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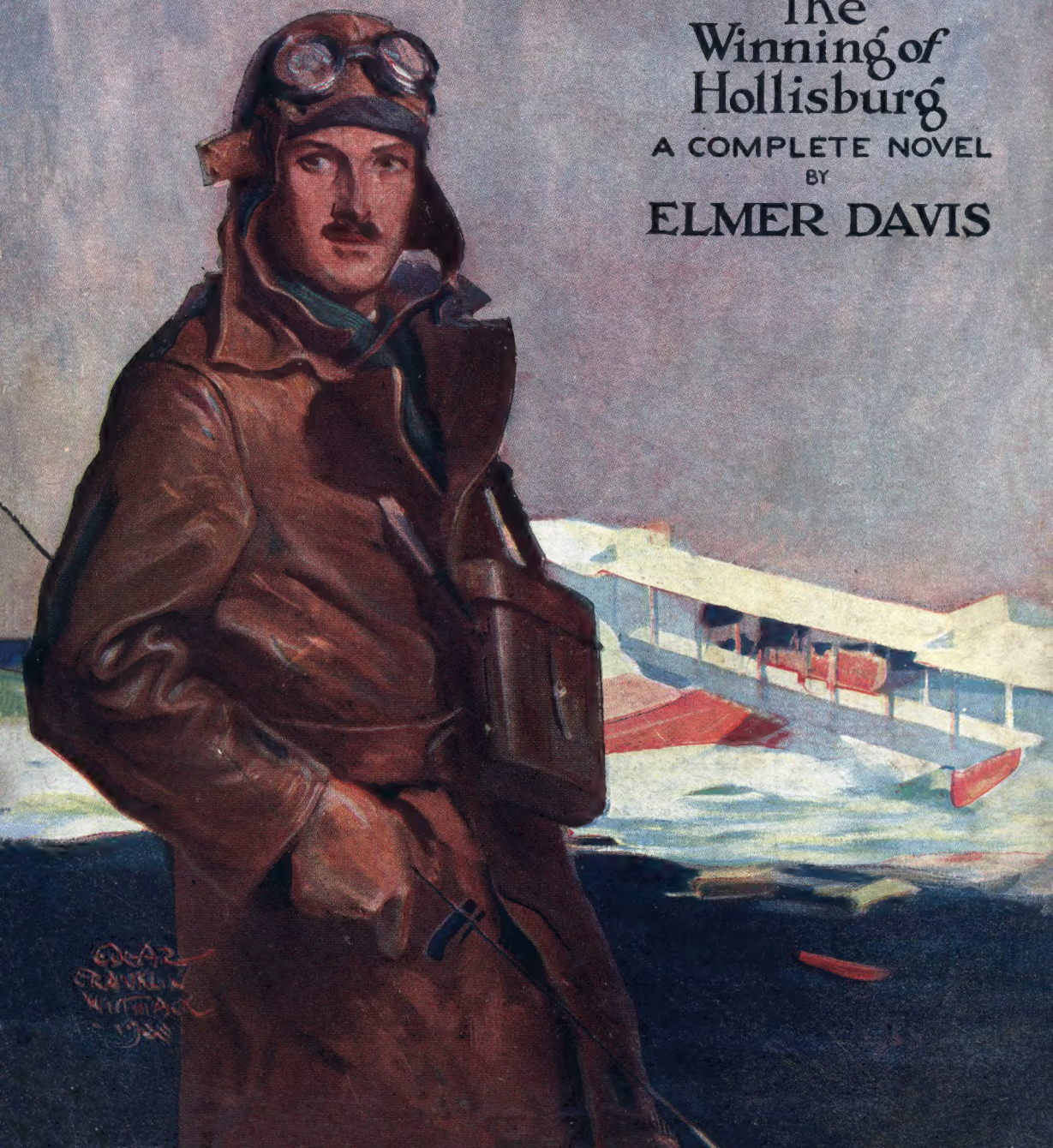
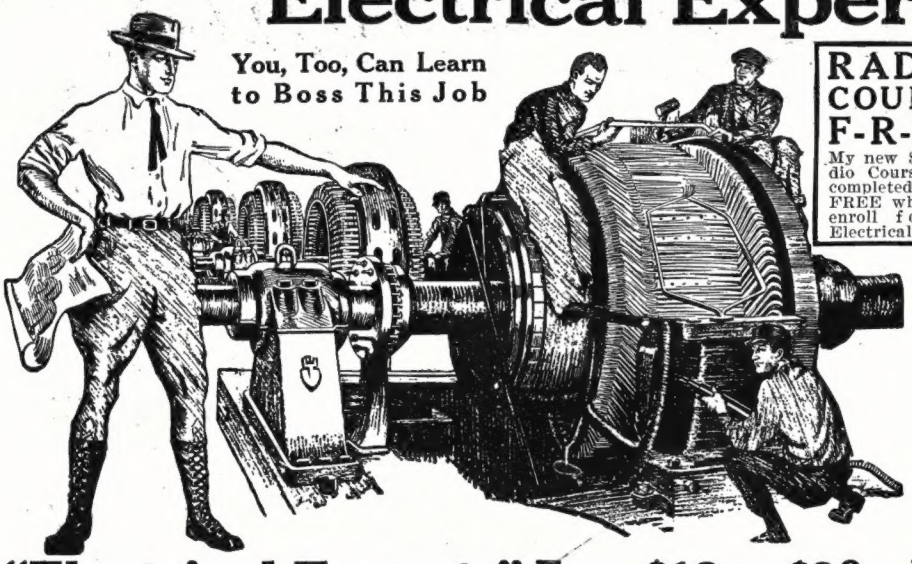
A COMPLETE NOVEL

BY

ELMER DAVIS



# Be a Certificated "Electrical Expert"

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My new $45 Radio Course, just completed, given FREE when you enroll for the Electrical Course.

## "Electrical Experts" Earn $12 to $30 a Day

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"Electrical Experts" earn $70 to $200 a week. Fit yourself for one of these big paying positions.

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Today even the ordinary Electrician—the "screw driver" kind—is making money—big money. But it's the trained man—the man who knows the ways and wherefores of Electricity—the "Electrical Expert"—who is picked out to "boss" ordinary Electricians—to boss Big Jobs—the jobs that pay.

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Get in line for one of these "Big Jobs" by enrolling now for my easily learned, quickly grasped, right-up-to-the-minute, Spare-Time Home-Study Course in Practical Electricity.

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You don't have to be a College Man; you don't have to be a High School graduate. My Course in Electricity is the most simple, thorough, and successful in existence, and offers every man, regardless of age, education or previous experience the chance to become, in a very short time, an "Electrical Expert," able to make from $70 to $200 a week.

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**The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man**

# Can Success Like This Be An Accident?

"THE fellows who used to work with me while I was plugging along at $25 a week are convinced that I either had a 'pull' or just 'fell into a good thing'—that my $9,000 a year position is a sheer accident.

When I told them I had found an easy way to earn big money as a salesman, they laughed at me and called it a 'harebrained idea.' They told me 'salesmen are born, not made.' But I decided to see my harebrained idea 'through.' I was sick of slaving for a pittance.

I started studying the secrets of master salesmanship as taught by the National Salesmen's Training Association—and almost before I knew it I had confidence to tackle my first selling position. And why not? I had mastered the very secrets of selling used by the most successful salesmen.

My earnings during the past month were $750. I now have better than a $9,000 a year position—with lots more room to grow. I can state positively that my sudden success was not an accident. It came because I knew how to sell scientifically. And how simple it is to sell when you know how. My regret is that I did not know these secrets ten years ago."—Ellis Sumner Cook, Manufacturers Agent, 20 E. Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Ill.

## Why Not Make More Money?

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F. K. Kramer, Pine Bluff, Ark., writes, "Since studying the N. S. T. A. Course I have increased my earning capacity from $2,200 to over $6,000 a year."

N. D. Miller, 1705 S. Clark Street, Chicago, says, "I place the credit for my success where it rightfully belongs. I owe my present position wholly to the N. S. T. A. In July, 1919, I studied your selling secrets and in September you secured me the position which I now hold. I am earning in excess of $100 a week."

Bear in mind that these stories of real success—the kind that is awaiting you in this field of unlimited money-making opportunities—are but a few of thousands on file. You will find scores of them in our literature.

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Address.....

City.....State.....

Age.....Occupation.....

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**Burton Stevenson starts a fine adventure serial, "THE STORM CENTER," in the next issue. There is also a complete book-length novel by William West Winter. Tell your news dealer to-day to reserve a copy of the next POPULAR, out on August 20th.**

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THE WINNING OF HOLLISBURG. A Complete Novel — Elmer Davis — 2
An epic of Middle Western life and evolution.

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Case was a square fighter, but he knew guerrilla tactics, too.

ONE-HUNDRED-PER-CENT COÖPERATIVE. — Thomas McMorrow — 100
A Short Story.
The fairy real-estate man befriends a deserted village.

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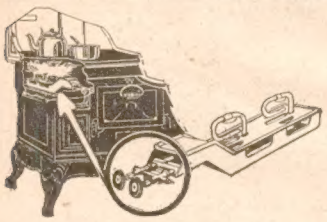

**Experienced salesmen are making more than ever before—beginners are making $50 to $100 a week and more. Spare time workers are turning their extra hours into golden profits—with an amazing invention that turns any cook stove, range or heater into a real gas stove.**

# New Invention Sweeps Country Like Wildfire

No wonder this amazing new invention is bringing fortunes to agents. All over the country this new device is doing away with old-fashioned methods of heating—yet requires no changes to be made in present cook stoves, ranges, and heaters. Already over 150,000 homes have been equipped—and ended forever the expense and drudgery of coal—making every stove a modern Oil-Gas Burner that gives three times the heat of coal or wood. No wonder agents are riding in on a tremendous tide of profits.

## It Sells Itself

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## The Secret of Big Money

You can understand why Bentley made $215 in one day, why Carnegey made $1000 in one month, and why thousands of other agents are cleaning up big, too. These men are cashing in on a lifetime opportunity. They know the time is ripe for this new Oliver improved Oil-Gas Burner. They know that this cheap substitute, that solves the fuel question, gives more heat than coal or wood, is going to be in universal demand—and is the thing they want to tie up to.

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You do not need to be a high-powered salesman. When people see the Oliver in operation they know at once that it is the thing they want. You will realize that this is a proposition that will pay you as big money as it has others. We have a definite number of open territories which we are ready to assign to those who act quickly. Every territory is filled with big money opportunities. Because, not only does this invention practically sell itself on sight but every one you sell, will sell several others as soon as your customer's friends and neighbors see it. You get credit and commission for every sale in your territory.

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If you want to make at least $5000 a year—or if you just want to turn your spare time into extra dollars—mail this coupon now for our offer. We want to give you the facts and let your common sense decide if it is a good proposition. And by sending the coupon immediately you will be entitled to a Free Sample Case Offer Mr. B. M. Oliver is now making. But you must act quickly. Fill out and mail coupon now.

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"Send following weekly hereafter: 10 No. 1; 8 No. 2; 4 No. 5."
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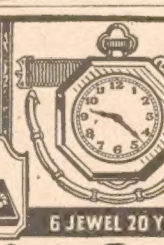

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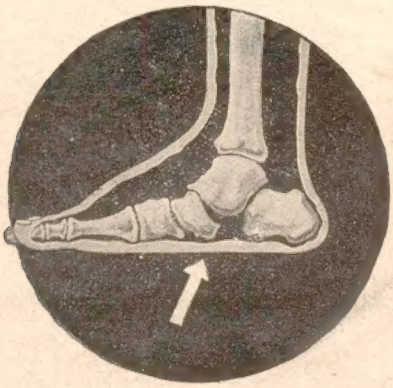


## *Thousands Say New Invention Banishes Every Ache—Instantly!*

**No braces; no straps; no metal; no rigid appliances; no bandages; no trouble or bother of any kind. Yet every pain, twinge and soreness disappears instantly—as if by a touch of a magic wand!**

NO longer need most of us suffer the tortures of tired, weak, aching burning feet! For foot specialists have perfected a marvelous new device which, usually causes every pain and ache to disappear **instantly.**

No matter how long you have suffered, this new invention is positively guaranteed to relieve you completely of all foot misery, or it costs you nothing!

Agonizing pains in the arches, instep, ankles, legs, toes and heels are at once relieved and you walk around with never a thought of foot pains. It's just as if you were given entirely new feet.

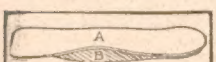
### Why Pain Disappears Instantly

Science has proved that 99 of every 100 foot pains are caused by faulty arches.

Now your arches—which are the "wagon springs" of your body—are held in place by certain muscles. But frequently these muscles become weakened so that the bones of your arches, under your weight, are forced out of place. Then you begin suffering all the tortures of fallen arches.

Yet, no matter how sore your feet may be, this new device at once **raises the flattened arches to their normal position,** immediately relieving the unnatural pressure that is causing your foot misery, and bringing you glorious foot comfort. The immediate relief from pain should actually amaze you!

### How New Invention Works




In diagram above, "A" represents a thin layer of soft flexible leather. "B" is a wonderfully resilient pad of specially compounded Russian Sponge Rubber. The supports conform to the exact contour of the foot in every position—not only bringing you instant comfort, but strengthening the foot muscles with every step you take.

The old way of treating fallen arches was to use rigid metal props, which usually weakened the arch muscles.

But this new invention, which can be slipped into any style shoe is entirely different. It is called the Airflex Arch Support, and is in the form of a light and springy pad, scientifically formed to the natural arch of the foot. Each pair is made of specially compounded Russian Sponge Rubber—which has been **surcharged with air.** They are so light and flexible that were it not for the instant comfort they bring, you would never be aware of their presence.

As you walk on them, this springy rubber exerts a marvelously gentle pressure at all points. This instantly raises the fallen arches to their proper position and automatically adjusts the displaced arch bones. Also as this light springy rubber yields to your weight it reproduces exactly the **natural spring of your arch!** Its constant compression and expansion at every step **massages, exercises and strengthens** the muscles in a natural way, thus quickly bringing back their old-time vigor and strength.

The New Airflex Arch Supports are **positively guaranteed** to banish all pain and build up the arches—and if after trying them you are not more than delighted with results, they cost you nothing.

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Don't send a cent in advance. Simply fill in coupon, giving the exact size of your foot as instructed below. Don't hesitate to order by mail, for every day we are fitting hundreds this way. In spite of the fact that these supports have regularly sold for $3.00—when the postman hands them to you, just pay him the amazingly low price of only $1.95 (plus few cents postage) in full payment. Slip the supports into your shoes. Try them five days. Then if you are not pleased in every way simply return them and your money will be instantly—and gladly—refunded without question. Mail the coupon today—now—and say "Good-bye" to foot pains forever. Thompson-Barlow Co., Inc., Dept. A-468, 43 West 16th Street, New York, N. Y.

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**THOMPSON-BARLOW CO., Inc.**
**Dept. A-468**
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**New York**

Send me, at your risk, the proper pair of your new Airflex Arch Supports. I will pay the postman $1.95 (plus few cents postage) with the full understanding that there are no further payments. If I am not satisfied after wearing them, I will return them in five days and you are to refund my money without question.

Name.....

Address.....

City and State.....

Size of Shoe.....Width.....Men's [ ] Women's [ ]

# THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXIX. AUGUST 7, 1923. No. 2

# The Winning of Hollisburg

By Elmer Davis

*Author of "The Big-town Game," "Lost and Found," Etc.*

**What Elmer Davis did for New York City in his last novel, "The Big-town Game," he has done for the small town in this tale of Middle Western life. And that is saying a great deal, for "The Big-town Game" is not only one of the best stories of metropolitan life we have read but, in general terms, one of the best pieces of modern fiction we have seen anywhere. You will be enthusiastic about "The Winning of Hollisburg." If you already know the small towns and think them dull places this story will open your eyes to their romance. If you do not know them, you will be an authority on their smallest characteristics long before you have turned the last page of this remarkable piece of work.—THE EDITOR.**

***(A Complete Novel)***

## CHAPTER I.

BILL REXFORD came into Hollisburg, Indiana, on a day of celebration. The store fronts along the three bricked blocks of Main Street, and the cluster lights on the corners, were gay with bunting. Little flags fluttered from the long rows of dusty automobiles parked on the side streets. Tinier flags adorned the hatbands of members of the chamber of commerce, brave in red-white-and-blue sashes, who assembled amid the melodious tooting of Lyons' brass band under the great streamer that hung from the chamber windows across Main Street with the legend, "Welcome to Hollisburg."

The welcome, however, was not for Bill Rexford. Nobody noticed him when he trudged into town through the oily dust of the river road. The welcome, the bunting and the band were all for B. F. Crisler, who was to arrive on the Chicago train at eleven-forty-three and who was approaching Hollisburg in entire ignorance of the fact that

the whole town was turning out to greet him.

Mr. Crisler, in fact, had expected to slip into town without making much noise; for such little noise as was desirable in his business he was used to making himself, at the proper time. He didn't know, when he wrote to the Pershing House to reserve him a room for Friday, the second of August, and when he got a letter of introduction from a Chicago bank to the First National Bank of Hollisburg, that Hollisburg had an up-and-coming chamber of commerce which made a point of doing things right for those who were worth it. And a little investigation had disclosed that Mr. Crisler was worth it. He represented, it appeared, a syndicate of Chicago capitalists who were planning to build a sanitarium somewhere on the hills along the Willow River. And when that became known the chamber of commerce held a pep meeting and decided to get that sanitarium for Hollisburg.

As it happened, Mr. Crisler wasn't in the sanitarium business. But since it had suited his convenience to pretend that he was, Hollisburg was getting ready to give him a fitting welcome. And so this morning, in the great stucco house on the river front, set back in the midst of a whole square of trim-clipped lawn, St. Elmo Pence, president of the First National Bank and of the chamber of commerce, was standing before the full-length mirror in his dressing room and practicing the gestures that were to accompany his address of welcome. And in the old gray house at the top of the Elm Street hill Colonel Oliver Perry Morton Hollis, chairman of the reception committee, was getting out the shaggy silk hat and frayed greenish Prince Albert coat that he had bought for the inauguration of Benjamin Harrison and telling his daughter Ruth that there was going to be a banquet at the hotel, so she needn't have them get dinner.

Colonel Hollis never had to practice his gestures. Years before, the last servant had left the Hollis mansion, where wages were subject to a permanent moratorium. Ever since her mother died Ruth had done all the housework herself. But the colonel ignored this descent from the heights; in his conversation "they" still did the work. And Ruth, who took her father as he was, merely nodded, reflecting that in that case she could go out for some tennis and a swim at the Country Club.

"Hustle with Hollisburg" was the motto of the chamber of commerce; and since St. Elmo Pence had started the habit of hustle, and made it pay, most other people hustled with him. Colonel Hollis never hustled, but no Hollis had, since the Mexican War. An indolence excused in the bearer of his honored name was held more seriously against lesser heretics, and the most notorious of these was Clay Sellers, the lawyer. About the time Colonel Hollis was starting downtown—that is to say, half past nine—Clay Sellers was just finishing his breakfast at Dan Cullen's lunch counter on Main Street. At that hour he was alone, except for Dan himself; so, after breakfast, he paused before the fly-specked mirror to arrange his few wisps of sandy hair across the great shiny desert on top of his head, sighed as he noted that even these survivals of youth were fewer than ever—then lit his corncob pipe, stared out at beflagged Main Street and gently murmured:

"Hell!"

"Huh?" asked Dan Cullen, wiping his hands on a greasy apron.

"I said," explained Clay Sellers, removing his pipe with an air of mild protest, "that there is too much hustle in this town. Used to be a good place to live, Dan, when we were kids—back in the 'nineties. A man could take his time in those days and still have enough to eat. But then Pence came along with his hustle——"

"And put Hollisburg on the map," Cullen finished. "We all make more money now—even you. I hear George Blades' garage cleared a thousand dollars last month. Nobody'd 'a' done that twenty years ago."

"Twenty years ago," Sellers objected, "a man could go as far as he wanted in a horse and buggy and see just about as much. Blades gets rich by buying used cars cheap from people that never could afford them and selling them with a fresh coat of paint to suckers that think they're getting a bargain. Which, Daniel, is what is known as progress. That's what's the matter with this town. Too much progress—too much Blades—above all, too much Pence."

"You're sore because even you have to hustle some now. I tell you, Pence made this town."

"In his own image," Sellers agreed. "Get something new—no matter what it is. Everybody along Commerce Street had to move out when Pence brought the glue fac-

tory to town; but the glue factory was a great thing because it made work for forty-seven men. This sanitarium—we don't know what it is; dope fiends, maybe, or then again——"

"It's liver complaint," said Cullen. "Herb Pence told me that himself. Our mineral water's just as good for that as French Lick, if it was advertised. As for Commerce Street, the people that moved out went and bought lots in Pence's Addition and they're puttin' up bungalows a sight better than them old tumble-down shacks they had to leave."

"Quite so. Pence's bank lending them the money to buy from Pence, with second mortgages at eight per cent. Pence making everybody that builds a house take out flood-insurance policies in his own company, when there'll never be a flood again with the new dam up the river."

"It was Pence got the State to build the dam; don't forget that."

"True," said Sellers. "After he'd bought up all the cornfields along the river to sell off as building lots, and got an option on the water-power rights."

"What if he did? He's a smart feller, Elmo Pence; smarter than you or me."

Sellers shrugged amiably.

"Oh, I don't deny that. Only I wish he'd let up on us now that he's got all the money a man ought to need. When I think of the nice, pleasant, easy-goin' place this town used to be it seems to me a glue factory's all we ought to be asked to stand, without his loading a sanitarium on us too."

"Somebody's goin' to get this sanitarium. Some town along Willow River. Might as well be us as Vernon or Adamsville. Gosh knows we're a better town."

"Oh, I expect this Mr. Crisler will fall for us," Sellers conceded. "Colonel Hollis will give him some good old prewar hundred-and-ninety-proof oratory and Pence will fill him up with pep talk. And nobody will give away our weak points."

"What, for instance?"

"A plague of tramps, for one thing."

"Flint's gettin' rid of the tramps. Three of 'em locked in jail right now, I hear this morning. He's goin' right after 'em. Flint's a smart chief. Why, there ain't been a car stolen in this town in six months and I hear down to Adamsville you don't dare leave one out at the curb overnight. Vernon the same way. All along the river, but not here."

"Cheaper to have your car stolen than to pay one of Blades' repair bills," Sellers objected.

"You're a croaker," said Cullen, drawing a steaming cup of coffee for a new customer. "What call have you got to knock the town—and Pence?"

Sellers pulled on his pipe.

"Why, Dan," he observed presently, "my kick against Pence is only that he's a little too much. He's got his million—now let him stop. If there's any of the rest of us that don't want a million, let him leave us alone. But no. He's got to have more. He's got to make us all go out for more. Pep—hustle—progress. He carries it too far. Tempting the Lord, they call it in holy writ. Hybris, the Greeks called it—when a man got so swelled up that he thought he was bigger than all the rest of the universe. And when he got that far, according to the Greeks, Nemesis lit on him. The universe tripped him up and showed him he was wrong. That's what happened to the kaiser. Maybe I'm superstitious, but I kind of feel that maybe that's what will happen to Pence. And if we're still taggin' along at his coat tails when that time comes, Nemesis will get us too."

"You read too many books," Cullen told him. "I don't know nothing about this Nemesis stuff, but I've seen plenty of guys that'd ought to have been tripped up by the universe, and wasn't. They lived to a ripe old age and had good sermons preached over their remains and the heirs divided the estate. I don't care what these here Greeks say. Demopoulos down here at the candy store always draws to a three-card flush. Think he knows more about what's what than Pence?"

"If Pence drew to a three-card flush," Sellers admitted, "he'd ketch. Even if he had to ketch 'em out of his cuff. So long, Dan."

"Goin' down to the station? It's too early."

"I'm going out to the Country Club for a swim. Let Pence welcome his sanitarium."

"Goin' out to swim in a lake that wouldn't be there if Pence hadn't had the dam built."

"Mr. Pence didn't build the dam for my convenience," said Sellers. "The dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children's table."

"If you see this here Nemesis you speak of," remarked Cullen sardonically, "you

want to tell him not to let Pence see him first. Likely he'd find himself in jail with the rest of the tramps."

## CHAPTER II.

Some hours before B. F. Crisler was greeted at the station with music and banners Bill Rexford dropped off the St. Louis freight at the water tank west of town. He had no intention of getting off at Hollisburg, or anywhere else so long as the train kept moving; but at the water tank the box car which had sheltered him for twenty-four hours suddenly was invaded by a prowling brakeman. Before Rexford could get out of the corner where he was lying half asleep the brakeman had climbed in; and though Rexford could have handled him in a rough-and-tumble, the brakie carried a crowbar. At sight of that Bill Rexford rolled out of the other door of the box car, clutching his bundle done up in a black cotton handkerchief—out of the door and down the embankment, bringing up with a soft thump in the first furrows of a field of tall corn beside the track.

Above, his triumphant enemy shook a fist at him.

"Gwan, yuh bum."

"I've gone," Rexford said pacifically. "How far am I from New York?"

The brakeman grinned as the freight pulled on.

"About six months' walk. And the roads ain't so good, either."

Bill Rexford looked about him thoughtfully. The track stretched away in a straight line, endless. Eastward, three or four miles away, were houses, lines of freight cars on a switch, the smoke from a tall stack. Away to the north a row of hills; behind him through the corn another ridge was dimly visible in the August haze. What this town might be he didn't know, nor even whether he was in Indiana or in Illinois; but he must be quite five hundred miles from his starting point in Kansas. So it couldn't be six months' walk to New York. Perhaps only four.

This town to the eastward was on the way home; but just now Bill Rexford knew that he was unfit to enter any town. His gray suit and gray cap, once respectable, were stained and spotted. His brown shoes were worn in the sole and run over at the heel; his khaki shirt was only a khaki shirt; he was hot and grimy and full of cinders and he hadn't shaved in two days.

He peered again through the ranks of the corn and discerned a row of sycamores in the distance. That must mean water, and toward it he trudged slowly, his bundle over his shoulder. It was hot, soggily hot, here in the furrows, but not too hot for a veteran of the Kansas wheat fields. He hadn't eaten for twenty-four hours, hadn't had a square meal in three days; but that was getting to be almost chronic. All he really needed, by the modest standards he had learned to set for himself, was a bath and a shave.

And after perhaps ten minutes' walk he came to something that promised both of these—a typical Middle Western river, zigzagging from side to side of a broad gravelly bed, with snags thrusting from the gravel here and there and masses of driftwood caught in the willow bushes that lined the banks. Just now it was a very tame river but in March it must have flowed far over the fields.

"Something like me," Rexford reflected. "I made quite a splash when things were coming my way; but when the source of supply dried up—now let's see if there's a swimming hole."

After a little exploration down the river he came suddenly on a long still pool. Sycamores overhung it on both sides, as far down as the distant bend; and in their deep shadow he could look down to a clear sandy bottom. Stripping, he plunged in, to swim with the vigor of an athlete who has been shut up for two days; then washed and shampooed busily with a cake of soap from his coat pocket, scrubbed his underclothes and hung them on the bushes to dry, and undid the black cotton bundle.

There was nothing in it but a black leather toilet case, expensive at one time, but sadly worn. However, it was enough for Rexford. He set up a hand mirror against the trunk of a sycamore, combed and brushed his hair, and proceeded to the long-overdue shave. It was slow and painful work but it made a difference. When he had finished nobody would have known that he had just been thrown off a freight train. The disreputable clothes were hidden in the bushes; safe in the disguise of stark nakedness Bill Rexford was a rather handsome young man of twenty-two or three, with black hair brushed back and

humorously wrinkled eyes, who looked as if he belonged on the edge of the swimming pool in a tolerably sumptuous athletic club rather than under a tree on the river bank.

Which, in fact, he did; though he had been so long on the road that sometimes he almost forgot it.

Rexford reached into the pockets of his bedraggled coat, turned them wrong side out. There fell out, first, a folded road map of Kansas and Missouri. He had no more use for that. Then a jeweled college fraternity pin, which after some thought he fastened on the under side of his coat lapel. He couldn't throw it away, but he couldn't wear it openly in his present state. Then a newspaper clipping which he carefully refolded and put back in an inside pocket. It was his patent of nobility; and with it he put away the two dimes which were all the money he could find.

There was, however, something else—besides the makings. A pair of dice. Rexford frowned at them. They were the reason he was reduced to two dimes. Ten days ago the end of the wheat harvest had found him with two hundred dollars—more than he had had for a year past. Unaccustomed wealth brought temptation; when he drifted into the county seat on Saturday night with his comrades from the fields he put his roll behind the ivories. But the luck he had always had in college had, apparently, deserted him along with other kinds of luck; so he was walking into Hollisburg with two dimes in his pocket, instead of riding into New York on a Pullman.

He rolled and lit a cigarette, blew a smoke ring out over the river, and thought it over. That stained coat was too vivid a reminder of a past and present that he wanted to forget. He tossed it back into the bushes; in this deserted spot he could lie naked, let the breeze dry him, and think of the clothes he was going to have six weeks from now. What lay before him in those six weeks he didn't know nor care. It would certainly be hard work and trouble such as he wouldn't have had to meet but for that unlucky evening of craps; but in the past year Rexford had got used to hard work and trouble and to taking them in his stride. He had learned to live from day to day, without worry; and he rather liked it.

But, after some reflection, he picked up the dice and hurled them out into the river.

"No more for me," he promised himself. "Looks as if the curse of Adam is on me. I have to work for mine."

And then, below and to one side of him, a voice broke the rural silence.

"Most extraordinary!"

Rexford whirled about and saw a youngish man, who had swum up under the shelter of the overhanging bank, clinging to an outthrust sycamore root as he floated in the water—a man of forty or a little less in a bathing suit that had once been black but was faded to a dingy gray; with a few wisps of sandy hair carefully combed over his bald skull. A queer-looking man, but his voice had a cultured inflection such as Rexford hadn't heard in this week of drifting; and the hobo was thankful that his clothes were out of sight.

"What's extraordinary?" Rexford demanded, rather annoyed at the intrusion on his solitude. Clay Sellers rubbed his chin.

"Several things," he replied presently. "Your costume ain't exactly usual hereabouts. I take it you're a stranger."

"So much of a stranger," said Bill Rexford, "that I don't even know if I'm in Indiana or Illinois."

"You're in Hollis County, Indiana. Not far from the famed town of Hollisburg."

"Its fame has never reached me," said Rexford politely, "but probably the misfortune is mine."

"Well, I'm not so sure about that. Though there ain't many in Hollisburg ever heard of your home town, either."

Rexford looked at him in amazement.

"What do you think is my home town?" he asked.

"Olympus," said Sellers gravely. "When I find a handsome young man, entirely nude except for a shavin' set, in this particular spot, I reckon I must have slipped back into those classic Grecian days, some way or other. The gods come back to earth. Probably you're Apollo."

"Apollo, hell!" said Rexford with deep indignation. "I'm—oh, well, never mind who I am. Nobody of importance."

"Now don't say that," Sellers sighed. "As long as I can think you're somebody of importance you're a mystery; and mysteries are so blame scarce in a small town when you've lived there all your life. Anyway, I'm glad you ain't Apollo. As I remember, he usually came down to earth with no good purpose."

This curious person was as much of a

mystery to Bill Rexford as Rexford was to him; but Rexford was more interested in geography than in mysteries.

"How far am I from New York?" he demanded.

"Eight or nine hundred miles."

"Huh! That's a long way." There was a silence, which was presently broken by faint sounds down the river. Distant voices, splashings. Toward the bend, the smooth green surface of the river was broken by the flash of white arms and colored bathing caps.

"Here come the nymphs, Apollo," said Sellers. "The Hollisburg Country Club is just around the bend."

But Bill Rexford already had disappeared into the shrubbery. The bushes rippled as he jerked his drying clothes under cover, and Sellers, abandoning his mystery, swam back downstream to draw the two girls away from this dangerous neighborhood. Leila Pence, plump and corn fed, in a new one-piece suit of green jersey silk; Ruth Hollis, slim and energetic, in a black satin slip which the whole club recognized as the residue of last winter's party dress. Sellers chatted with them in midstream, but he saw no more of the mysterious stranger; and he had long ago fallen into the habit of keeping mysteries to himself. So when Leila said that they really must get back, that the fellows were waiting, Sellers swam away with the two girls; and after an interval Rexford crawled out of the bushes and put on his clothes.

He was no Apollo but he had something of an eye for nymphs. The girl in green wasn't to his taste at all; but the other—the handsome sardonic face under the red bathing cap, the muscular white arms that flashed out in sure powerful strokes—she didn't look like the ordinary all-too-contented small-town girl. She was different and for the first time in months Bill Rexford was conscious of the fact that it was a long time since he had talked to a girl of his own kind.

However, his clothes were a reminder that nymphs meant nothing in his life just now. The immediate business was to get something to eat; the ultimate business, to get back to New York. But Bill Rexford had had enough of box cars; the only thing to do seemed to be to walk on into this town, find a job, earn enough to keep him going, and perhaps lay aside something toward railroad fare. After all, he didn't have to get back to New York for six weeks more.

Five minutes later he came out on an oiled motor road along the river, reduced once more to the social level of his clothes. During his conversation with this queer man in the water Rexford had forgotten that he was a tramp, but now he found himself slinking along in the familiar mood, apologetic and resentful, that had been begotten by a long series of mishaps. When he realized this, a mile or so down the road, he pulled himself together, threw back his shoulders, and strode out with something of a swagger; but just then an automobile horn honked behind him, and he stepped automatically out of the way like a peasant giving place to the lord of the manor.

And in fact it was the lord of the manor, or at least his heir. This bright blue car with a shiny nickel hood carried young Herb Pence and his sister Leila, and George Blades who was engaged to Leila, and Ruth Hollis who was likely to be engaged to Herb before long—all coming back from their morning of tennis and swimming and in a hurry because Herb and Blades were going to the banquet for Mr. Crisler. But they were not in so much of a hurry that they didn't see the lone pedestrian trudging along by the side of the road.

"Another bo," Herb grunted. "Too many of them, now the town's growing."

"Tell Flint to look out for this bird," Blades advised from the back seat. And since everybody knew that Flint, the chief of police, would do what the Pences recommended, Ruth Hollis stared curiously at Flint's next victim as the car shot past. Rexford caught a glimpse of a white bandeau about black bobbed hair, and a handsome somber face that he had last seen in the water, under a red bathing cap. A curiously dissatisfied face, proudly sullen; and sullenness was the last thing to be expected in this fat, comfortable country.

Ahead of him the car stopped suddenly.

"No use bothering Flint," Herb Pence grunted. "I'll fix this fellow."

For though this morning outing was his party Ruth had almost ignored him. She was polite, but not even coldly polite; indifferently polite; she had swum off up the river with Leila while he and Blades were tarrying in the locker rooms for a little drink, and had come back with Clay Sellers, whom Herb despised. Of course nobody

took Clay Sellers seriously, but Herb wasn't quite sure Ruth took himself as seriously as she had seemed to do a few months ago, and he was seized with a quick-rising desire to show off before his girl, to display his manly prowess and mastery of a situation.

But as he strode off down the oiled roadway Ruth was merely wondering wearily why Herb should get satisfaction out of trampling on inferior pitiable persons. For inferior and pitiable this tramp seemed to be.

Rexford, plodding on with the unhurried persistence of a man who has a long way to go, looked up suddenly into the frowning face of a stocky young man in white flannels. Not even the frown could make Herb Pence's face look very terrible; it was fat and pink under a bristling growth of tawny hair; it looked altogether too full and contented. But Herb was doing his best to be terrible; and he was strongly built.

"Where are you going?" he demanded.

"New York."

Herb hadn't expected this, and his next remark, carefully prepared, wouldn't fit into the conversation. All the Pences had to practice their gestures and were seriously upset if anything threw them off their stride. Also, he knew that Ruth and the others were within easy earshot; flustered and angry he was searching for a phrase that would provoke resentment and enable him to knock down this man who was considerably smaller than himself, when he broke in sharply:

"What are you looking at?"

Rexford was looking at the Phi Chi fraternity pin on Pence's shirt; its mate was under his own coat lapel.

"Nothing," he said mildly.

Herb shifted from one foot to the other. His moral offensive had gone wrong. This miserable creature wouldn't give him any provocation; and to hit him without provocation was likely to seem, to Ruth, too much like a massacre. His display of mastery wasn't coming off.

"No impudence, now," he snarled, "or I'll lay you out. Go on to New York if you want to; but don't stop in Hollisburg."

"Can you think of any reason," Rexford asked mildly, "why anybody should stop in Hollisburg?"

"Huh?" Herb demanded aghast. And then he heard ruinous sounds behind him—laughter; the rather contemptuous, if musical, laughter of Ruth Hollis, the deeper, but to his ears just as contemptuous laughter of George Blades. Only Leila Pence, true to the traditions of her family and their town, saw nothing funny in it.

Herb teetered from one foot to another, his fists clenched. He wanted to hit this maddeningly mild face—to smash it to bloody pulp. But something kept him back. There was a hard alertness in those eyes that he didn't like; and on closer inspection this slim young fellow seemed rather strong. Herb would have taken the risk just the same but that he knew he had no provocation; none, at least, that would seem plausible to Ruth. He could have risked Ruth's displeasure if he had been sure he could win. But the double hazard was too much.

So he glowered at his antagonist for a moment, then turned away with a growl:

"Make a detour around Hollisburg. If we catch you in town you'll pound rock."

He climbed into the car without looking at Ruth.

"Wouldn't dirty my hands on him," he explained. "He wasn't worth it."

## CHAPTER III.

An hour behind the speeding blue car Rexford came into Hollisburg. Ahead of him was the business section—exactly like that of a hundred other towns he had seen in the past year. To the right the hill rose sharply, with stately old trees lining the steep streets and old houses half hidden by the foliage. But on the left, in the flat lands along the river, was a different town—Pence's Addition, as the signboards proudly announced. A wilderness of half-finished bungalows set in small flat lots separated by high white trellises; beyond, a row of houses finished and occupied, each with its square white garage and its white-painted clothes pole behind it. To Rexford it looked painfully like one of the newer ready-to-wear Long Island suburbs of New York; out of place in this pleasant unexciting landscape that he was learning to like. And it centered about a huge white stucco castle on the river front, its red-tiled gables rising high above the cottages around it—set back in a huge flat lawn well grown with transplanted shrubbery. Over all hung the rancid smell of the oil that lay thick and black on the clotted dust of the streets.

"I suppose," Rexford mused, "that Pence lives in the middle of his own addition. The sort of man that would put up this flock of chicken coops would be proud enough of it to live there himself. I certainly see no reason to tarry in this town of Hollisburg."

Main Street was almost empty—B. F. Crisler had arrived and was dining with the leading citizens at the Pershing House; other citizens were dining at home and telling their wives about the unimpressive appearance of the Chicago capitalist. Rexford didn't know that, of course. He merely walked on till he saw the sign "Dan Cullen: Lunch." And at Cullen's counter he spent one of his dimes for a sandwich and a cup of coffee, then rolled a cigarette and smoked on his stool, watching Main Street come back to life after the dinner hour. Here in town his clothes, though rather dusty, were no more disreputable than those of some of the curbstone loungers; Cullen had treated him not as a hobo but as a customer. Rexford addressed him hopefully.

"What chance of picking up some work? This looks like a live town."

"Sure it's a live town. What kind of work?"

"Almost any kind."

"Sounds like old times," Cullen observed. "Nowadays most folks pick and choose. What can you do?"

"Well, if you're short-handed, I can make coffee and fry eggs."

"Not a chance. Got any more talents?"

"I can drive a car, take it to pieces and put it together again; pitch hay, hoe corn, shock wheat; swing a pick; break horses if they're not too wild——"

"In fact," Cullen grinned, "you pretty blame near invented unskilled labor, didn't you? Well, if you know so much about cars you might try Blades' garage. It's pretty much of a close corporation there—George has got his own gang—all colored men but him and his man Rufe. But they're rushed with work."

"Thanks," said Rexford. "I'll try it. Mind if I park this bundle behind the counter for the afternoon? There's no dynamite in it."

Blades' garage was at the corner of Main and Poplar—a two-story building of cement blocks, square and ugly, its entrance flanked by red and yellow gasoline pumps. Rexford thrust his head into the little office where a stooped man in overalls looked up from the roll-top desk with a malignant cross-eyed glance.

"Mr. Blades, I suppose?" Rexford suggested. "I'm looking for a job."

"I ain't Blades and there's no jobs."

Rexford had long passed the stage of being discouraged by this familiar remark.

"I can see from here," he said, "that you're short-handed. And I can do anything around your shop."

"Oh, you can, eh?" said the other, rising. "You think you know so durned much, you come see Blades. He's around side."

Rexford turned into the unpaved side street where tall elms arched out from the sidewalk to meet over the roadway. The man from the office was close behind him—almost suspiciously close behind him—following in his tracks as they marched down the long side of the cement building to the board fence surrounding a row of sheds behind it. Just outside the gate a negro was painting an old car; and behind it squatted a man in white flannels who straightened up with springy quickness at the sound of footsteps.

"What's this, Rufe?"

"Feller wants a job," said the cross-eyed one. "Won't believe me when I tell him there ain't any."

Rexford looked up into a long, cold, colorless face under close-cropped blond hair, with light-blue eyes looking down coldly into his. It was a face he had seen that morning, in the back seat of the bright-blue car; and George Blades evidently remembered him. He was silent for a moment, reflective; then menacing.

"You were told to walk around this town," he said in a soft hissing voice. "You'll wish you had if the cops run across you."

"Why make me pound rock," Rexford argued plausibly, "when I'm an expert mechanic of the kind you need?"

"So you're an expert mechanic, are you? Know anything about a Sagamore car?"

"I used to drive one."

Blades' eyes ran over him and Rexford flushed at the realization that he didn't even look like a rich man's chauffeur fallen on evil days.

"Whose?" Blades demanded.

"My own," said Rexford irritably.

"Your own? Hell! Get out. No jobs here. And if you're still in town in half an hour you'll be headed for the rock pile."

Rexford wanted to hit this tall sneering person much more than he had wanted to hit the fat sneering youth in the road that morning. But he had wanted to hit a good many people in the past year; a few of them he had hit, at first; and he had learned that it doesn't pay to hit a prosperous citizen of a strange town. So he swallowed his native impulses and turned away with a pretense of indifference; and as he turned he saw a man grinning at him across the street; a youngish man, almost bald, smoking a corncob pipe, who sat in a chair tilted back against the wall of a story-and-a-half brick building under the sign: "H. Clay Sellers. Attorney and Counselor at Law."

Now Clay Sellers was grinning at Blades, whose irritable brutality toward helpless inferiors wasn't at all like his smooth social manner. Malicious side lights on respected characters always amused Clay Sellers. But Rexford, of course, didn't know that. He knew only that a man who had talked to him as equal to equal, when his clothes were out of sight, was now laughing at him when he was revealed as a floating laborer. So he strode across the street, flushed with an almost forgotten sensitiveness.

"Clothes make the bum," he said sullenly. "I suppose you wasted a lot of unnecessary curiosity on me this morning. Well, you see I'm a tramp. Know anybody that wants to give me a job?"

"What kind of job?"

"Any kind."

"Such eagerness deserves its reward," said Sellers. "Any kind." He glanced across the street; Blades and Rufe were watching them sharply. Sellers stared back at them, puffing his pipe.

"Any kind?" he repeated. "Well, I hear Colonel Hollis needs his grass cut."

"Where do I find him?" Rexford demanded promptly. He didn't see the grins that crept over the faces of Blades and Rufe; he didn't pay attention to the wrinkles around Clay Sellers' eyes.

"Well," said Sellers, "likely he's still down at the hotel. I saw him there at the chamber-of-commerce banquet and I reckon the most prominent citizens haven't left yet. The Pershing House. An old gentleman with a gray, walrus mustache and a plug hat that's seen better days. You can't miss him."

"Thanks," said Rexford and strode away cheerily. This ought to enable him to earn his supper and a night's lodging and every day was one more day. He would be in bondage only six weeks more.

Behind him Blades grinned across the street at Sellers.

"That was a mean one, Clay."

"I told the truth," Sellers drawled. "The colonel does need his grass cut."

"This fellow a friend of yours?" Blades asked.

"Oh, I ran across him up the river this morning." And, once started, Sellers told of the curious encounter in some detail. "I had a hunch he might be a visitor from Mars," he explained, "or somebody that fell out of an airplane. Never struck me that he might be a plain knight of the road." Though he remembered as he said it that Rexford wasn't at all an ordinary hobo. There was still a pleasant mystery; enough to muse over on a dull afternoon.

"Looks as if that's what he is," Blades agreed. "Probably stole that leather toilet case you saw him using. Yes, it was funny."

But when he and the stooping Rufe had wandered back to the garage, out of Sellers' hearing, they looked at each other with questioning suspicion.

"Damn funny," said Rufe. "You don't reckon——"

"I don't mean to take a chance," Blades told him. "He's no hobo; you saw his face. And he was mighty persistent about getting in here. Rufe, you go tell Flint about him. No rock pile for him; tell Flint to run him out of town."

## CHAPTER IV.

A block down brick-paved Main Street was the Pershing House, and on its wide veranda Colonel Hollis lounged in a rocking-chair, talking to B. F. Crisler. Rexford knew the colonel at sight, but approaching him was another matter. The silk hat and frock coat were antique but there was a rather fierce dignity in the lion face framed in curly gray hair, and the head built on the grand scale of the Daniel Webster period. It would be an impertinence, Rexford felt, to address this gentleman on any subject of less importance than the tariff—which, in fact, was the topic he was then discussing with the colorless man in steel-rimmed spectacles and thin grayish hair who sat beside him.

For Mr. Crisler this conversation represented the first chance to get his bearings

in an exhausting and astounding day. He could talk about the tariff out of his subconsciousness while he was readjusting his state of mind, and his conversational resources, to fit the unexpected hospitality of Hollisburg. So he talked on; but as Rexford watched them, lounging diffidently on the sidewalk, the conversation was suddenly ended by the appearance of the great man of the town. The only Rolls-Royce in Hollis County rolled up to the hotel steps and a stocky, commanding man in a cream silk suit got out, strode up on the porch and announced in a voice that could be heard up and down the street:

"Well, Mr. Crisler; have to interrupt you. We must get out and take a look around the town and the surrounding country. Behind time already."

He didn't even bother to apologize to Colonel Hollis, who responded with stately dignity to Crisler's polite farewells. Nor could either Rexford or Hollis overhear Pence's remark as the car bore him and Crisler away:

"I shouldn't have let that old windbag waste so much of your time."

"He was a very entertaining and well-informed gentleman," said Crisler mildly.

Pence's hand waved in deprecation.

"Oh, the colonel can talk—that's all he can do. One of our historic antiquities. We took his measure long ago, but it isn't fair to inflict him on a stranger. Now, Mr. Crisler, on the left is the Masonic Temple, and that building on the opposite corner——"

Pence's abruptness had had no perceptible effect on Colonel Hollis, who indeed had hardly noticed it. Life would have been intolerable to Oliver Perry Morton Hollis if he had ever had to realize what his fellow citizens thought of him; for which reason his consciousness had long ago got into the habit of rejecting all the manifestations of that opinion. Just now he thought only that Mr. Crisler was a very entertaining and well-informed gentleman. His hand slipped toward his vest pocket; it came out with a cigar—one of the fifty-cent cigars provided especially for the banquet by the chamber of commerce. As he came down the steps he lit it, inhaled a deep draft, closed his eyes, opened them slowly, and blew a cloud of blue smoke down the street; and it was in that unfamiliar mood of expensive magnificence that the watchful Rexford caught him.

"Colonel Hollis?"

The colonel jerked back that huge square-cornered head and stared curiously at this shabby but rather engaging young man.

"Yes, sir."

"I was told you wanted somebody to cut your grass."

Another blue cloud floated away toward the corner as the colonel came back from affairs of state to the petty cares of the household, but his spirit was still in that fragrant haze of Havana vapors.

"Why, yes," he rumbled. "It does need cutting. Undoubtedly. I hadn't thought of it, but it does. You know the house, of course?"

"I'm a stranger in town."

"Ah! Of course. The gray brick house at the head of Elm Street. Anybody can show you the way. You will find the necessary implements on the premises."

He stalked away slowly, ringed in blue smoke wreaths, as Bill Rexford asked his way to Elm Street.

It turned off the Main Street brick, a side street running southward, dusty under its coating of smelly oil, shadowed by infrequent trees. As he went on the shade trees grew closer together, the houses farther apart. Pence's Addition and the business section of Hollisburg were flagrantly up to date, with a conscious and painful effort that annoyed Rexford, though he conjectured it didn't annoy the residents. But a block down Elm Street he had dropped back a quarter of a century, into McKinley's administration; and every corner took him a decade farther back.

First a straggling zone of old brick houses, half business, half residential, set close to the street, their narrow strips of lawn held up by knee-high walls. Beyond the next corner the street rose gradually between fenced yards that surrounded frame or shingle residences, with the rounded protuberant fronts, the thin-posted porches, of twenty years ago, and stained-glass windows on the stair landings halfway up the side wall. The slope grew steeper, the houses older, uglier and more stately. By imperceptible stages Rexford found himself mounting a rather abrupt hill. The lawns were larger now, and more unkempt, set with elms and beeches whose smallest limbs were more imposing than the lately planted saplings of Pence's Addition. Grass grew between the cracked and waterworn flag-

stones of the sidewalks; tufts of weed thrust up from the decayed macadam of the street.

Pence's Addition had been lively with the shouts of children, the hum of vacuum cleaners, the soft hiss of sprinklers whirring on the lawns; but a great quiet hung over the Elm Street hill. The children had grown up and gone away to the city forty years ago. Now and then the hushed murmur of voices in a parlor, dim behind drawn blinds; the distant hum of a sewing machine. The oil smell that hung over the lower town was lost in these higher altitudes, and Rexford caught the faint odor of the full-blown, haze-hung vegetation of August, on the brink of autumnal decay.

Two hundred feet above the business section a final cross street cut across the head of the roadway, the hill rising behind it in precipitous, thicket-covered slopes. Between the thickets and the street lay a row of brooding, sleepy brick houses, homes of the great families of a Hollisburg that had died before the Pences were born. And right at the head of Elm Street was the biggest and oldest of them all, the Hollis mansion. It sat high up on the hillside, at the top of a long flight of flagstone steps running up between sentinel lines of sycamores. Along the street a stone wall had once held back the terraced lawn; but terraces had shifted into formless bulges, and gaps had opened in the wall so long ago that the blue grass grew long and smooth over the débris spreading out over the sidewalk. Rexford mounted the steps slowly and stood at last before a closed, shuttered and silent house.

A huge tall house of brick that had once been painted gray, with a cupola rising from the mansard roof. There were gaps in the slats of the tall shutters, and at more than one window they were missing altogether; everywhere shabby blue shades were drawn clear down to the floor. Curling chips of paint clung to the brick walls and the shutter slats, and when Rexford tugged at the pull bell he heard no sound.

Another pull, with the same result. He rolled and lit a cigarette. It was pleasant, here on the hill; for the first time in a year —perhaps in his life—he felt free from the never-ending push of the struggle for money, for getting on. Even before he had ever dreamed that work could enter his life he had felt its pressure, the irresistible pressure of a world where nearly everybody was working at frantic speed. But here on the Elm Street hill work was an incongruous thought. No doubt such things happened, but they were a part of life, not all. There was time for reflection; for rest.

And yet the quiet of the hill street was the quiet of old age's armchair, if not of the grave. Old age—this had been a great house sixty years ago, but its present ruin was so shabby that it had lost even the mournful splendor of decayed magnificence. And on the terraced lawn grew a tangle of vegetation two feet high. Rexford had come to cut the grass. But grass survived only in scattered patches—tall patches of blue grass gone to seed, struggling hard to keep up its head like a decadent aristocracy among pushing parvenues, and just as surely about to be choked out by the thick-growing weeds. Colonel Hollis' lawn was a weed patch; obviously it hadn't been cut this year, nor last.

Rexford perceived that he had been made the victim of a village joke. And yet Colonel Hollis had sent him up here, had expected evidently, that he would find somebody who would put him to work. So he tossed away his cigarette and took the weed-grown sidewalk around to the back door

## CHAPTER V.

His footfalls muffled by the weeds, he came up silently behind a girl who was standing beside the back steps, washing one of the windows that even here came clear down to the floor. For an instant Rexford stood silent, fascinated by her quick grace, the sweeping motion of her bare muscular arms. White arms moving in long sure strokes, just as he had seen them flashing in the river this morning. At first sight he had supposed she was hired help; but that wouldn't account for her clothes—a faded blue sleeveless sweater, a shabby white skirt, white stockings and white canvas shoes. Plainly an outworn sport costume; and her black hair was bobbed—a practice which hadn't taken hold in what was left of the Middle Western servant class.

Then she saw his reflection in the windowpane and pivoted suddenly, confronting him with the somber face that he had seen in the river under a red bathing cap, and in Pence's car under a white bandeau. Just now a dustcloth was caught around her head like a turban; but that didn't spoil the face.

"No hand-outs here," she said briskly.

"I didn't come for a hand-out. I was sent up here to cut the grass."

Rexford suspected that this announcement must have been a stunning surprise to Ruth Hollis, a reversal of the whole order of nature; but she didn't show it. She merely looked at him silently for a moment, then asked:

"Who sent you?"

"Colonel Hollis. At least"—Rexford suddenly saw the possibility of deeper trickeries—"at least, a gentleman who was pointed out to me as Colonel Hollis. With a gray mustache, and a silk hat——"

A smile flitted across the somber face.

"I guess that's right. There are only three silk hats in town and we know them all by name. You'll find a scythe and a rake in the woodshed, and a whetstone. You'll probably need it."

And without giving him any further attention she went back to the business of washing windows.

Rexford would have liked to sentimentalize this interview, in his own reflections. He and the girl were companions in undeserved distress. They were of the same class; he had a vague feeling that she had understood that, too. A girl—a rather startlingly attractive girl—sprung, evidently, of an old and once wealthy family, reduced to washing windows in a house that was falling to pieces. A young man who ought to be playing polo on Long Island but was condemned by fate to look for odd jobs at kitchen doors. He felt that they were like the traditional high-bred pair flung ashore on a desert island and compelled to hustle for enough to eat. He would have liked to talk it over with her.

He found contentment, presently, in the rhythmic swing of the scythe. It was an absurd and antiquated exercise, surviving even in Hollisburg, he supposed, only here on the hill where the slopes were too steep for lawn mowers; but there was a regularity about it that soothed his spirit. His muscles, too, moved with an easy tireless grace; nothing like those terrible first weeks last year when each day brought new aches and sorenesses to a body which had supposedly been hardened by the genteel sports but had never been prepared for manual labor.

And now—Rexford made the discovery with a startled horror—he was beginning to like manual labor. Swinging a scythe—at least under the shade of Colonel Hollis' sycamores—was about as much fun as swinging a golf club. Of course, manual labor offered no rapid road to wealth and fame; but in his case there were other considerations. He had been driven to it, at first, but he began to wonder if he wouldn't like it as a regular occupation; provided, of course, that he didn't have to live on his wages.

Hour after hour he mowed, whetted, raked, through the long hot afternoon. It was pleasantly restful here on the silent shaded hill. Gradually his first dislike of Hollisburg vanished. The downtown streets, the cheap smartness of Pence's Addition, he certainly didn't like. They were modernism made absurd. But the hill was the refuge of an older, more leisured civilization that still retained some grace and dignity even in decay. They must have been pleasant people who lived here in the 'sixties and 'seventies. Probably the stock had declined in modern times; but there hadn't been anything decadent in the appearance of the girl at the back door.

He supposed she was still working about the house behind those drawn shades, but he saw no more of her and heard no more of her till late in the afternoon he heard her playing on a feeble piano, playing Debussy with a light touch that covered up occasional lapses in technique by virtue of a full supply of temperament. Not like the phonographs shrilling jazz in Pence's Addition.

From a distant corner of the grounds he saw Colonel Hollis toiling up the long flight of steps, his silk hat in his hand and a big silk handkerchief mopping his pink forehead. He disappeared in the house and Rexford went back to visions of himself in a new business—grass cutter by appointment to the old nobility of Hollisburg.

Half an hour later, with the lawn smoothly mown and the last clothes basketful of grass piled behind the woodshed, Rexford came to the kitchen door to get his pay. His feet hastened of their own accord as he came within earshot of a kitchen range where something was snapping in a skillet. Exercise had given him a fierce appetite. Through the screen door floated out the smell of frying chicken and the aroma of a coffee which wasn't at all like the cup he had had at the lunch counter. Only a sandwich since yesterday morning; three days since he had had a square meal; but in half an hour he would be eating every-

thing Dan Cullen had to offer. The expectation of even Dan Cullen's fare made him restless as he knocked timidly at the back door.

Ruth appeared behind the screen, a long bungalow apron swathing her blue dress.

"I'm through," said Rexford.

"How much were you to get?"

"I don't know," he confessed. "Whatever is customary."

"You came about two o'clock," said Ruth. "And now it's six. Wait a minute."

He waited while voices murmured indistinctly within and the fried chicken and coffee continued to rouse aspirations that could never be gratified at Dan Cullen's. Then he heard her returning footsteps and the colonel's voice booming beyond:

"Ask the young man into the library, Ruth."

Rexford followed her through a high narrow hallway, with a narrow straight stair descending precipitously within its black-walnut railing; through a parlor furnished with horsehair sofas and marble-topped tables of carved walnut; into the library. On the parlor wall he had seen great splotches of bare plaster where the ancient wall paper had fallen away; but the library wall was hidden by tall walnut bookcases, except for the rectangle over the roll-top desk where the portrait of a lady in crinolines hung in a chipped lacquer frame. Thousands of books, but all in ancient bindings of calf or worn morocco. Nothing in that house—except Ruth—was less than fifty years old.

Colonel Hollis had laid aside the frock coat and vest, and sat in the informal ease of blue suspenders and a bulging stiff shirt held together by a single gold stud. The lion head was reared back; but the face was gloomy, helpless, weakly ashamed. Ruth moved to her father's side and stood there straight and uncompromising as the colonel cleared his throat.

"You have worked four hours, my daughter tells me. I believe the usual rate for such labor here is twenty-five cents an hour. H'm! Unfortunately, I left my pocketbook at the office and we do not seem to have much small change about the house. If you will call on me in the Hollis Building to-morrow morning——"

To-morrow morning! The smell of frying chicken floated in through the open door.

"Colonel Hollis," said Rexford, lost to his sense of shame, "I have just ten cents in my pockets. I came into town this morning and I've got to eat. Nobody knows me; I haven't any credit."

The colonel and his daughter looked at each other grimly.

"May I ask," said the colonel huskily, "how you came to apply to me for work? Who told you I wanted my grass cut?"

"I don't know who he was—I'm a stranger. I asked one or two men on the street where I could get some work and I was told that your grass need—that you wanted somebody to cut your grass."

Ruth waved a hand in helpless anger as the colonel sat up straighter and thumped his desk.

"Whippersnappers!" he snorted. "Contemptible whippersnappers! I am unable, sir, to discharge my obligation to you this evening, but you must not suffer from my fault. I shall be delighted if you will sup with us."

Bill Rexford turned white.

"Colonel, I—I can't do that."

"Can't?" the colonel rumbled.

"Of course I can't. I'm a—casual laborer, I believe the sociologists call it. In plain language, a tramp. Your daughter will tell you that she saw me walking into town this morning and heard me ordered to keep out of Hollisburg. And my clothes are——"

"My dear sir," said the colonel frigidly, "I do not propose to submit to dictation as to whom I shall invite to my own table. Your clothes and your occupation are beside the point. If I choose to ask you to supper, that is none of your business. Ruth, have them serve the meal whenever it is ready. Well, Mr.—Mr. Rexford?—well, sir, it looks as if there is a good deal of dissatisfaction with the tariff——"

They dined in a tall bay-windowed room, at a battered walnut table set with worn damask and a miscellaneous assortment of fine china chipped and cracked—dined on fried chicken and gravy, grapefruit salad, hot biscuit, three kinds of jelly, and sweet-potato pie. The Hollises might have fallen from their high estate but they still set a good table. When Ruth took away the dinner dishes to make place for the coffeepot the colonel disappeared for a moment and came back with two of the fifty-cent cigars provided at the noon banquet by the chamber of commerce, which he had thriftily stowed away for the evening. Bill Rexford

lit one of them and forgot everything that had happened since his grandfather died.

The colonel led the conversation, with grave courtesy; the crops, the tariff, the changes in the Willow River valley since the new dam controlled the annual floods; the prospects in the fall elections. Not a word about the Hollises; not a word about the past or the future of Bill Rexford. It was the sort of conversation the colonel might have conducted with any well-informed visitor; it was in fact substantially the conversation he had conducted with B. F. Crisler earlier in the day.

Rexford hadn't had the advantage of a rehearsal but he did his duty, talking not much but with sensible moderation; and Ruth, sitting straight behind her coffeepot with a dignity and composure that couldn't altogether conceal a youthful vitality, subdued but not deadened by the burden of this great dying house, threw in the occasional intelligent interjection that might be expected from a woman citizen who was going to cast her first vote this fall. No less than her father, she made Rexford feel at home —when she talked; but while she was removing the dishes, or serving him, he felt a difference in her manner. She might have been a captive Roman princess setting a meal before a triumphant Goth. It was his comfort, as he picked his way down the precipitous slope of Elm Street through the night, that there had been nothing Gothic about his behavior. He hoped they must have found him unexpectedly satisfactory for a tramp who had worked for his supper.

## CHAPTER VI.

If Rexford had known his way about town, or if he had gone straight down to Main Street and followed it back to the lunch counter where he had left his baggage, he would have been run out of Hollisburg that night. Police Chief Flint, under the prodding of two citizens so prominent as George Blades and Herb Pence, had hunted about and discovered the bundle behind Cullen's lunch counter; had opened it, and concluded that this expensive leather case must have been stolen by the tramp who carried it; and was persuaded with difficulty that it would be better to drive the tramp out of town than to lock him up pending the collection of evidence to support a charge of theft.

Flint waited at the lunch counter for Rexford's inevitable return; the only reason he didn't look for him at Colonel Hollis'—the joke having been duly passed on to him—being that nobody could have foreseen that the colonel, under the influence of a Corona Corona, would so far forget realities as to hire a man to cut his grass. But Rexford tried a short cut back to the lunch counter, got lost, and finally found himself coming down toward Main Street on the quiet thoroughfare that ran past George Blades' garage. And in front of the story-and-a-half brick house that faced the side entrance sat his adviser of the afternoon, smoking a corncob pipe and regarding Rexford as he came into the light from the street lamp with a benevolent and rather compunctious curiosity.

Rexford stopped short and looked at the man in the chair, then at the sign: "H. Clay Sellers. Attorney and Counselor at Law."

"You may get by as an attorney," he observed, "but you're a hell of a counselor."

"I reckon so," Sellers sighed. "Did I get you into trouble?"

"Me? Don't worry about me. The only thing you did to me was to give me a chance to look at the humiliation of a fine old gentleman——"

He choked into outraged silence. Sellers' eyes were still smiling.

"Yes," he agreed, "Colonel Hollis is a fine old gentleman. If we forget that sometimes, in his home town, it's because he's done nothing but be a fine old gentleman ever since he was born. I've got nothing against being a fine old gentleman but it's not exactly a gainful occupation. And since somebody has to pay the freight, the colonel merely manages to shift the burden.

"So he didn't want his grass cut, after all? Now, dern me, I ought to have been humanly decent enough not to do that to a stranger within our gates, especially when you really wanted a job. I'm ashamed of myself, that's a fact. And if I can do anything to make it up——"

"You can't," said Rexford. "I cut his grass, you see, and if I call at his office tomorrow morning I'll get a dollar for it. But, Mr. H. Clay Sellers, I believe the old man needs that dollar more than I do. I'm down to my last dime but I haven't got an establishment to keep up. So I'm going to collect my baggage and move on."

"Where to?"

"Eventually to New York. To-night to the nearest comfortable haystack."

Clay Sellers chewed his pipestem.

"I'd advise you not to," he said. "For one thing, the police are waitin' for you at the lunch counter. They haven't made up their mind yet whether to lock you up for stealin' that nice leather case or set the dogs on you and run you out of town."

"Let them," said Rexford peevishly. "If they think——"

"Hold on. Don't get fresh with the chief of police in a strange town. Besides, Hollisburg is run by its best people, and I gather that for some reason they've passed the word to Flint that you're to get the gate without fail."

"So he meant it," Rexford mused. And then, since Clay Sellers seemed inexplicably interested in his welfare, he told him of his argument down the river road that morning.

"That was Herb Pence," said Sellers. "The crown prince. And, I judge, his sister; they two and Blades and Ruth Hollis run around together a lot. One engagement announced and the other expected. If that gang said run you out, Flint'll run you out. Hold on. Don't hunt trouble. Come inside. If you don't mind my asking a few impertinent questions maybe I'll give you a little professional advice—without even askin' you your last dime for it. As it happens, my friend, I don't like the people that run this town any more than they seem to like you; and I owe you some reparation for that mean trick I played on you. If we can talk this thing over maybe we can figure out how to circumvent these Bladeses and Pences."

Sellers pulled down the shades in the front room that served him as an office—a plain room heavily banked with law books, the soft gaslight throwing friendly shadows over the shabbiest corners. But the leather chairs, if worn, were deep and comfortable; and on the mantel over the fireplace stood a row of books that had nothing to do with the law. Rexford stopped to examine them before he sat down. A Bible; a set of Shakespeare; Augustine's "City of God" in Latin; Herodotus and Plato's "Republic" in Greek; "Of Human Bondage;" "Candide;" "The Education of Henry Adams;" and Van Vechten's monumental work on the cat. From the books Rexford looked back to their owner.

"You were born on the hill," he said. "What are you doing half a block off Main Street?"

Sellers chuckled.

"I'm not exactly on the best terms with the chamber of commerce," he admitted, "but bein' a bachelor with no ambition I've got all I want, so they can't hurt me. They think I'm a bad citizen, and likely they're right. A few hundred people like me would ruin the town; or at least the hoorah boys that run it; but I'm in a minority of one, so I'm harmless. Now tell me about your afternoon."

Rexford told him everything—what had happened and what he thought about it and what he supposed the Hollises must have thought; rolling one cigarette after another as he let his feelings carry him away into a lament on the decay of old families, particularly old families with charming daughters.

"There's a good deal in your view of it," Sellers admitted when he had finished. "More than most folks here would admit. Because, you see, the colonel's an old story with us. His ancestors settled the county and founded the town. His grandfather was a general in the Mexican War. His father was in Congress. But by the time they got down to Colonel O. P. M., the Hollises had about run out of genius, distinction, energy and the rest of the qualities they'd brought over the mountains from Virginia.

"Lord knows I'm no enthusiast for needless work. But the Hollises lost their money—so long ago that even I've forgotten when and how. Likely they're like D'Artagnan's ancestors, impoverished by the crusades. Anyway, by the time the colonel was your age he ought to have known that it was time to go to work. But the Hollises hadn't had to work since they chased the Indians off the town site and it was just plain too much for him. He never could bring himself to it."

"But doesn't he do anything? How do they live?"

"Oh, I wouldn't say he doesn't do anything. He's been writing a history of Hollis County for the last thirty years. Goes up and reads chapters of it to the State Historical Society now and then, or gets them printed in the Indianapolis papers. He's been a presidential elector and alternate to national conventions—all that on the strength of his name—and on the governor's staff. That's where he got his title.

"How does he live? Well, I don't know how he figures it to himself but I'll tell you how it is. He owns his house and a stretch of vacant lots on Whitcomb Street that would be good residential property, now the town's growin', if everybody hadn't got the itch to put up a bungalow in Pence's Addition. And he owns the Hollis Building. It's the finest historic ruin in the business district—worse even than this one. Whenever he needs money he plasters another mortgage on the Hollis Building or the house—Pence holds five or six of 'em. Mortgaged for twice what they're worth already and no chance he'll ever pay it off; he pays the interest on the last mortgage out of the principal of the next one. So you might say that our fine old gentleman—which he is—is practically livin' on the charity of Elmo Pence."

"How about his daughter?" asked Rexford. "She works."

"She keeps house—a nineteen-room house—and she keeps it spick and span. But we ain't supposed to know that. Everybody in town knows it, of course, but the Hollises act as if it was a secret. They live way up there on the hill away from everybody and when Ruth sweeps and dusts she pulls down the shades so nobody'll see her. That's her father's doing, of course; she's got more sense. If they moved into a five-room bungalow in Pence's Addition she could keep house with hardly any work at all; but that would be comin' down in the world, and besides, the whole town could see her shakin' out the mop on the back porch. So you see the ignominy of work is a matter of theory more than of practice. It's a fact with the colonel, but Ruth works like a truck horse so that he can go on bein' a fine old gentleman."

"Why does she do it?"

Sellers regarded his visitor gravely through the smoke clouds.

"Because she's a Hollis. Because she was born and raised on the hill. Some people, you know, think a lost cause is the only one that's worth sticking to. I've known her all her life and I don't doubt that her honest opinion of her father is about the same as mine; but she stands on the burning deck and won't even admit she smells smoke. Couldn't go away to college, though plenty of people would have lent her the money; it would have been admitting that the Hollises had come down in the world to take it. Makes her own clothes out of last year's and looks as good to me as Leila Pence that buys hers in New York; but she don't look as good to Leila Pence, nor to herself.

"Luckily, there's one way a poor but proud young lady can accept money without makin' any damaging admissions; and if she marries Herb Pence, as I expect she will, why, it will be a sign that the Hollises have decided to come to terms with Destiny. That bein' the only reason a sensible girl like Ruth would marry a young pimmy-ammy like him. Elmo Pence would give 'em the mortgages for a wedding present, and the colonel could go on being a fine old gentleman."

"It's a damn shame," said Rexford eventually.

"I kind of surmised you were a person of insight," Sellers admitted. "But that isn't why I've told you the history of the Hollis family. I told it to you because I can see you've come down in the world and ain't got used to it. And I thought maybe I could show you that there are worse things than coming down in the world; one of them bein' not to come down in the world, when it's time to come."

## CHAPTER VII.

"Oh, I've come down," Rexford assured him. "I wouldn't say I like it but I'm getting used to it."

"Hit bottom yet?"

Rexford grinned.

"Depends on how far down the bottom is. I've tried. I've never gone in for begging or burglary but I understand they're both skilled trades. My line is plain rough labor—unless I find somebody that wants an automobile mechanic, as your Mr. Blades doesn't."

"So you've hit bottom," Sellers repeated. "All right. Then you'll let me lend you carfare to Adamsville."

"No, I won't. Not that I know where Adamsville is, but it doesn't sound like a place I want to go to."

"In the main," said Sellers, "there isn't much to choose between Adamsville and Hollisburg—though my fellow citizens would lynch me if they heard me say it. There's just about one difference; Adamsville is twenty miles nearer New York."

"The answer is still no."

"Huh! I suppose you want me to lend you carfare to New York, then."

"I don't want you to lend me anything I'm headed for New York but I'm going to work my way. Don't have to get there for six weeks and in the meantime one place is just as good as another. In fact, if I could get a job I'd just as soon spend a little more time in Hollisburg."

This statement, popping out suddenly, was a bigger surprise to Rexford than to Sellers; only this afternoon, he remembered, he had hated this town instinctively. But since then he had seen the hill streets; and he had dined in state with the Hollis family. In the dreary day-to-day routine of the past year that was a large event; though he was probably crazy to dream that it might happen again.

"We'll have to get Flint off your neck before you can stay here," Sellers mused, "but I reckon I can attend to that. Want some work, eh? All right. See those books?" Rexford followed his glance to a corner where they lay in stacks, some still wrapped as they had come through the mails, others undone but still in paper jackets; piles of books, cubic yards of books; with dust lying thick on the farther heaps. Sellers chuckled.

"It ain't so bad as it looks," he said. "Books are my only vice. I buy 'em from catalogues and stack 'em up on the floor as they come—read the top ones off the pile now and then, but I never know what I've got a foot or two below the surface. I bought some new shelves last month but I've been too blame lazy to sort 'em out.

"Now I take it you know something about books. I imagine it would be about a week's work to sort these out and catalogue them, and I could afford——"

"It would be about a day's work, and you know it," Rexford interrupted. "Blessings on your kindly face, and all that; but I don't need that kind of lift. Couldn't take it, if I did."

Sellers projected two or three more smoke clouds at the ceiling before he resumed.

"If you want to stay here," he observed finally, "you'd better stay with me. Ain't many others you'd find congenial, I imagine; certainly there ain't many others I find congenial. I owe you a good turn to make up for that mean trick I put up on you; but aside from that, Mr. Whatever-your-name-is, I have an idea you and I'd be company for each other. And if you figure on staying in Hollisburg after the warnings you got from Blades and Herb Pence, you'd better keep within reach of a counselor at law. I live in the back rooms of this old antique ruin—my uncle left it to me and since I can't sell it I make the best of it. Colored woman comes in once a week to clean up, but in between times it could stand a little attention.

"What I really need"—he looked solemnly at Rexford through the eddying smoke drifts—"is a competent office boy. Somebody who would sweep out of mornings, brush the dust off the sidewalk now and then, water the grass in the side yard, chop wood for the bathroom heater—and who would and could catalogue books in his spare moments and pretend to listen to me of evenings when I run off my random thoughts on the defects of the universe. For such a person I could afford to pay as much as two dollars a day; it would be a convenience to me as well as to him if he would lodge on the cot in the spare room upstairs; and durin' such times as we were engaged in philosophic argument I'd furnish the tobacco. Have you got down that far?"

Rexford thought it over, grinning.

"As long as you give me enough manual labor to do," he said presently, "I guess that meets the conditions. Consider your offer jumped at. I presume you furnish the broom."

"All right. You're hired. And if anybody tries to lock up my laborious office boy on the charge of vagrancy we'll not only tell him where he gets off but see that he gets off there. Which is sometimes more difficult. And now will you kindly tell me why you're willin' to catalogue my books, and so forth, only on condition that you have to sweep out besides?"

Rexford took out of his pocket a worn and smudgy clipping from a New York newspaper.

"That tells all. The secret history of my noble birth. You see why I want to get back, but not too soon."

Sellers read:

**REXFORD CUTS OFF GRANDSON**

**Bulk of Steel Man's Estate Goes to Union Theological Seminary**

The will of Benjamin Rexford, former president of the Thorhammer Steel Company, who died July 21st at his residence at 470 Park

Avenue, was filed for probate yesterday. The estate is described as amounting to "upward of $10,000 in personal property," and Henry F. Carpenter of 120 Broadway, the executor, refused to make any closer estimate, pending appraisal of the property. Former associates of Mr. Rexford said, however, that he had left about $3,000,000.

With the exception of minor bequests to servants, the entire estate is left to the Research Laboratory of Pure and Applied Theology at Union Seminary. The only surviving relative, William Rexford, a grandson, who is a student in Columbia College, receives $1, "which," says the will, "is more than he deserves."

A codicil, however, contains the following provision: "But if for one year from the date of probate of this will my said grandson, William Rexford, shall have supported himself exclusively by manual labor, without recourse to loans or subventions in any form, I direct my executor to pay him from the residuary estate the sum of $25,000. His word as to the fulfillment of this condition is to be accepted, for with all his faults he doesn't lie; but it is to be clearly understood that this bequest becomes effective only on condition that he has supported himself by the sweat of his brow. That he should ever be able to make his living by intellectual pursuits I regard as unthinkable."

Young Rexford, who is living at the Phi Chi fraternity house on One Hundred and Fifteenth Street, said that he would make no effort to break the will. "It was grandfather's money," he said, "and he had a right to do what he wanted with it. I am going to look for a job."

Sellers handed it back with a grunt.

"Vindictive old gentleman, wasn't he? From three million to twenty-five thousand is quite a drop."

"So it is," Rexford admitted. "But all I've thought of lately is the difference between twenty-five thousand and that one lone silver dollar that I drew from the estate and threw as far as I could hurl it off Brooklyn Bridge. Oh, well! I'd never been worth a hoot—that's the truth of the matter. I'd been a good deal of a thorn in grandfather's flesh; and when it got down to where he and I were all that was left of the family he naturally thought that when he was gone it would be all gone."

"But why are you lookin' for a job in Hollisburg? It's a long way from New York."

"That's one of the reasons. I could have got a job as a taxi driver, I suppose; but I didn't like to be picked up and tipped by girls I used to dance with. Oh, I had some grand ideas then. Get as far away as possible from people who would want to lend me money, for fear I'd crack under the strain. Travel—see the country from the under side. Well, I got an eyeful. You see, I wasn't much good in college—the rudiments of a polite education, but nothing I could turn into money; a little talent in golf, but not enough to turn pro; a little in tennis but not enough to stall around from one tournament to another as a technical amateur. A hundred-per-cent dub—that's what I was ten months ago. Whereas now I'm a passable horse wrangler, something of a street cleaner, a little bit of a lumberjack and almost an expert farm hand.

"Oh, it was good for me. For a while every new job made a new muscle ache; but now I'm tough and hard and used to getting up early. When I turn up at No. 120 Broadway on the fifteenth of September to crawl back into the middle class this year will look like a romantic venture in real life. But it looked like hell while I was at it."

"What do you figure on doin' with this money when you get it?" Sellers asked.

Rexford lit another cigarette and looked for his future in the smoke clouds.

"There you have me," he admitted. "I'd intended to go into a brokerage office when I got through college—not that I cared anything about it, but most of my friends were going down to Wall Street and I wanted to stick with the gang. Well, that's one thing I won't do; I know that now. Grandfather's three millions would have been thirty if he hadn't been frozen out when the steel corporation was organized. If he couldn't keep up in that company, I know I can't."

Sellers knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

"Well, Friend Rexford, it will give me some pleasure to be the only citizen of Hollisburg who knows that you're really a fairy prince in disguise. For everybody else you're the Beast. Don't forget that when Beauty saunters past. Except—let me see that clipping again." He reread it with a widening grin.

"Curious," he said at last. "Very curious. You may have had a few slings and arrows from outrageous fortune in the past year, Friend Rexford, but this time your luck was with you. So you're a Phi Chi?" He spoke a phrase that would have been meaningless if not ridiculous to the profane; but it meant something to members of this particular fraternity. And Rexford gave him the proper answer, turning out his coat lapel as he did so to show the hidden pin.

"I guess you belong," Sellers admitted.

"Very curious. For, as it happens, Hollisburg is a Phi Chi town. Most everybody that is anybody, including me who am nobody, comes from the State University chapter, except Herb Pence who went to Cornell. Socially and commercially every Phi Chi that comes to Hollisburg finds his fortune made and all wrapped up for him."

"Even if he comes on foot looking for odd jobs?"

"Might happen even then, though I admit you've got a bad start. Fit you out in some new clothes and even Herb Pence would probably offer to lend you money."

"I don't want to borrow money and I can't afford new clothes. I didn't join the fraternity to use it as a meal ticket."

"Well, before we try to swing anything by fraternal favor let's see what we can do with our legal rights. Suppose we go down to the lunch counter and have it out with Flint."

They went out into Poplar Street, dark save where gaps in the leafy curtain let down broad splashes from the high-swung arc lights, and turned away from the dazzling brightness of Main Street into deeper shadow.

"You're running my business better than I could run it," Rexford admitted, "but I'd like to know why you're going away from the lunch counter."

"Oh, we'll get to Dan's presently. 'S long as you're goin' to be with us for a while you might as well get initiated into the customs of Hollisburg. All of us old-timers go down and take a drink from the blue-lick well before we go to bed of nights. That's how we cheat the graveyard. Here—back in the shadow. You can't see it but you can hear it."

"And smell it," said Rexford, stumbling through the dimness of a vacant lot toward the kiosk from which came the trickle of splashing water and a terrible stench as of ten million rotten eggs. "Do you mean to say this stuff gives you long life? You earn it."

"The fountain of youth," Sellers rebuked him. He was leaning against one of the posts that supported a small pointed roof over a pipe from whose faucet, waist-high, a stream of water poured into a lime-incrusted iron basin. "Some bring their cups; some use the community dipper; but we old residents stick our heads under the faucet. If you cut yourself when you shaved this morning this stuff will disinfect you."

Rexford duly thrust his face at the stream, caught some of it in his mouth and more on his forehead, hair, and shirt, and came out spluttering in a fearful reek of hydrogen sulphide.

"If your police don't run me out now," he grunted, "they have no sense of public decency."

"Oh, no," said Sellers. "You're one of us now.. We can all recognize you as a fellow citizen a block away."

"Yes, but these are the only clothes I happen to possess.. Sold the others in Kansas City; had to eat. And now these will have to be buried."

"Not a bit. Our cleaners are used to gettin' the blue-lick aroma out, for those that are particular enough to want it removed. I'll send your suit out in the morning."

"And let me do the Apollo till it comes back, I suppose."

"Why, if I had a pedestal to stand you on I suppose I could powder you up to look like a statue; but then you couldn't do much to them stacks of books. No, Rexford, you and I are about of a size."

"Now if you think I'll wear your clothes," Rexford broke in, "when you're overpaying me for my work and putting me up——"

"Durn it, you hired to work for me and take my orders. And my first order is to look fitten around the office, even if you have to wear my clothes. No, don't you go thinkin' I'll make you wear out my old suits. I'm goin' to make you wear my new ones—the clothes I buy for my annual trip to Chicago. I'm too lazy to put 'em on around home. Maybe you think you'd look better without 'em, but a respectable law office is no place for Apollos."

"Oh, let up on Apollo," Rexford grunted. "That isn't my name."

Sellers laughed softly.

"I don't reckon your name's Nemesis, is it? No? Let's move on to Dan Cullen's."

## CHAPTER VIII.

There was mirth and melody that night in the home of St. Elmo Pence, but not in the same room. The melody was going on in the parlor, where the light of parchment-shaded lamps, bracketed on the tapestried walls, fell softly on the busily working keys of a grand piano. Paderewski was

giving Chopin absent treatment, via an electric switch; but nobody was listening to Paderewski and Chopin. Herb Pence was downtown playing bridge at the chamber of commerce. Leila, mistress of the household since her mother's death, was swinging lazily in a Gloucester hammock at one end of the long screened porch, burbling with soft laughter at the conversation of George Blades; and farther down the porch, in wicker armchairs, St. Elmo Pence talked and B. F. Crisler listened.

Mr. Crisler had been listening to St. Elmo Pence for the better part of the past ten hours and he was beginning to feel a yearning for silence.

An hour in Pence's bank; conversation with the officers, the employees, the directors who dropped in as if by chance; an hour on the floor above with the officers and directors of Pence's real-estate corporation and flood-insurance company; a trip around the town and through the near-by country in Pence's limousine, with Pence giving him the history, assessed valuation and probable market value of every piece of property they passed; dinner at Pence's, lavish and rather surprisingly formal for a family affair; and now this long session with Pence on the porch.

It hadn't been wasted, for in B. F. Crisler's business nothing was wasted. Before he arrived that morning St. Elmo Pence had been only a name on his letter of introduction; but now he had packed away in his head a pretty complete history of Pence and of Hollisburg. Indeed, you could read that history in Pence's face—a jaw that spread out right and left and forward far beyond the rest of his features; a hard heavy nose hooked forward over an iron-gray mustache; glittering gray eyes under bushy iron-gray brows. Obviously this man could crash through the weak spineless mass of his fellow citizens like a brick through a crate of eggs.

But all this Mr. Crisler had gathered in the first half hour and now he wanted a rest. He wanted it, among other reasons, to get time to think up plausible answers to questions about his sanitarium; for on that topic the eager interest of Hollisburg's up-and-coming business men had brought him pretty near the end of his rope.

So when Pence offered him another cigar he said that he would have to be going back to the hotel.

"You're determined to stay at the Pershing House?" Pence demanded in a tone which made it plain that this was an interference with the will of Pence which Mr. Crisler was likely to regret. "You've seen the hot, stuffy, noisy room you'll get there. I've saved a room for you upstairs that's as big as the city park. And service, man! If you'd ever lived in a small town you'd appreciate my three colored boys. You won't find their equals in any club in Chicago."

"I don't doubt it, Mr. Pence," Crisler admitted, wiping his spectacles. "But the fact is I'm troubled a good deal with insomnia. Very often I have to get up in the middle of the night and put on my clothes and walk the streets for a couple of hours before I can get back to sleep. That wouldn't do in a respectable household. You'd wake up and shoot me for a burglar."

Pence chuckled.

"Hollisburg hasn't had a burglary in five years. Virtually no crime of any sort, since prohibition."

"Prohibition?" Crisler asked, glancing at the empty glasses on the table between them.

"Oh, well," Pence laughed, "you and I can be trusted not to abuse this stuff. George Blades' partner gets it for me and for one or two other people. I don't know what connection he may have with the distributors, of course; and I never ask, Mr. Crisler. I never ask. Better have another before you go."

"No, I think not. So you're free from crime. Well, that's quite a point in favor of Hollisburg. I hear that Adamsville and Vernon can't say as much."

"They certainly can't, Mr. Crisler. If you've seen the statistics of automobiles stolen in those towns—I'll have the secretary of the chamber send them to you to-morrow—you'll realize that they have a real criminal class. Frank Flint has cleaned all that out, in Hollisburg. Safest town you'd want to find anywhere. Add that to our unequaled situation, our splendid mineral water with its curative properties—you haven't tried it yet, have you?" He pushed a bell and a white-coated negro appeared. "A couple of glasses of blue lick, Jim, and a bottle for Mr. Crisler. Now, Mr. Crisler, I'll give you a slip with the chemical formula according to an analysis by the State chemist's office—make your own, of course, to

check up on it—and if you can find anything like it in Adamsville or Vernon or French Lick for that matter——"

"Oh, I've heard of the merits of your water," said Crisler. Twenty people had brought up the topic at the banquet. "But you understand this is just a preliminary trip to look over the country. I'll have to scout all along the valley——"

"And remember that my Rolls-Royce is at your disposal every day. The children will have to get along with their little cars."

"Why, that's very good of you, Mr. Pence——"

"Not at all, not at all——"

"But I'd a little rather pick up a second-hand Ford and run it myself," Crisler finished with surprising firmness. "I may want to look around on some roads that your big car could hardly manage—for even here in Hollis County, Mr. Pence, I suppose you must have a few bad roads. I'll make a deal with Mr. Blades in the morning——"

"Make it to-night—he'll be going downtown pretty soon; likely he'd be glad to talk things over with you. He and Leila are as matter of fact as a married couple—he never stays after ten."

"Now, dad," Leila's lazy voice drifted up the porch, "don't you go slandering us to Mr. Crisler. I've heard every word you said."

But her father's next remark was in a confidential undertone.

"And when you're looking over Hollis County, Mr. Crisler, by all means don't forget to make a closer inspection of the old Miller place. You remember—I showed it to you from the bend in the road this afternoon. Right on the edge of the bluffs overlooking the valley and the town—finest air, finest view that you'll find in twenty miles up and down the river. Right on the State road, easy water connection from the reservoir south of town—I don't see where you could find a better location for your sanitarium.

"There's about a hundred acres in it. Maybe you wouldn't need that much. I had to take it over in foreclosure a couple of years ago and I've got a lazy tenant on there that doesn't produce more than enough to pay taxes. Lord knows what he lives on; but I've been too busy to turn him out and put in a better worker. I could let go of the part along the edge of the hill and join up the rest with some other property of mine right next to it. And I don't mind telling you in confidence, Mr. Crisler, that I'll let you have all or part of that farm twenty-five per cent below the assessed valuation. Hollisburg has done a good deal for me and I'm willing to do this much to bring your institution to Hollisburg."

"That's a very generous offer, Mr. Pence."

"Well, I'm one of these restless fellows; like to see something done and done right. If other people would do it I'd let them; but I've learned from experience that I generally have to lead. And then these old hard-shells up on the hill get their backs up and won't follow. It's just possible that the entry of some outside capital, now, such as your syndicate represents, might loosen some of them up. And that would be a good thing for all of us, in the long run."

So there was money in the town that Pence hadn't been able to reach. Mr. Crisler didn't see that this fact was of any particular importance to him, but he put it away carefully in his memory; for anything might turn out to be useful later on. Even if it wasn't useful, it was curious; Pence didn't seem to be the sort of man from whom a dollar could hide.

But Mr. Crisler veiled these reflections with the remark that he would have to be getting back to the hotel to see if he could go to sleep. Pence let him go with reluctance; and when at last they had risen, and Crisler had picked up his hat, he was halted for a final piece of advice.

"When you pick Hollisburg for your site, Mr. Crisler—and we know you'll pick Hollisburg after you've looked over the field—you'll probably need some legal advice from time to time. I recommend Sammons & Blythe—best firm in town. They handle all my business; and between you and me, they have connections with the courthouse crowd—they and I—well, you know these things are useful sometimes. Bear them in mind."

"I will," Crisler promised as Leila Pence came down the veranda to see him off, George Blades' long, colorless face looming over her shoulder. There was a complacent little smile—as always—on her pretty face, the smile of a girl who is only plump and doesn't quite realize that some day she is going to be frankly and unalterably fat. She took Blades' arm with one hand and laid another on her father's shoulder.

"Well, dad, I hope you've converted Mr. Crisler into a permanent settler. George and I would have come down to help you sell him the Hollisburg idea if we'd thought you needed us."

"Listen to her," said the beaming father. "Best little Hollisburg booster of us all. Lord help me, they say I run the town, but Leila runs me; and pretty soon she's going to marry Blades——"

He didn't add, "And then Blades will run the town." Nobody said it, but evidently all four of them thought it at the same time; and St. Elmo Pence became suddenly silent, while the smile of paternal pride very gradually faded out. He hadn't considered that.

Leila's smile, however, couldn't be erased; and Blades saved the situation by coming in with a quiet:

"And then she'll run me, too, and make me like it." But Mr. Crisler surmised that no woman—least of all Leila—would ever manage George Blades.

As they gradually passed from the momentary constraint into the exchange of formal good nights, heavy feet stumbled up the steps and Herb Pence thrust his way into the group, hot and blowing.

"Dad, something has got to be done about Clay Sellers. Of all the damned impudence——"

Crisler noted the curious frown that ran across St. Elmo Pence's face as he squared his shoulders—a frown in which a little apprehension seemed to blend with a great deal of annoyance.

"What's he done?"

"There was a hobo," Herb spluttered. "I passed him on the road comin' back from the club this morning, and told him to walk around Hollisburg. You remember, Leila—you, too, George. Instead of that he came right in town and began asking people for work."

Blades nodded.

"He asked me for a job," he admitted. "I told him to move on, too."

"Well, he didn't move. He'd left a leather dressing case at Cullen's lunch counter—anybody could see he stole it; and Flint was waiting there to pinch him tonight. A little while back who strolls in but this hobo—Rexford, he says his name is—with Clay Sellers. And when Flint reaches out to grab this fellow for vagrancy Sellers says he's hired him as office boy. I was there—so was your man Rufe, George. I told Sellers what happened this morning; and he—he laughed. Damned impudent shyster——"

"How about this dressing case?" Blades interrupted. "You said he'd stolen it."

"I said he must have stolen it. Anybody could see it didn't fit his clothes; but he said it was his and Sellers said he was not only this fellow's employer but his counsel; and Flint wilted. He must have figured that Sellers was too smart for him to fool with."

"Well, a man isn't a vagrant when he's an office boy," the elder Pence admitted. "But Sellers needs an office boy about as much as I need a guardian."

Blades wasn't smiling now.

"Sellers," said B. F. Crisler. "Was that the lawyer you mentioned to me, Mr. Pence?" And Mr. Pence, having met Crisler only that morning, couldn't be expected to know that he never forgot either names or faces.

"No, I spoke of Sammons & Blythe. This Sellers is a lazy, pettifogging, cantankerous sort of fellow—always making trouble for the progressive element."

"Then of course he isn't on good terms with the—er—courthouse crowd. Yet he seems too smart for the police."

"Oh, he's smart," Pence conceded. "But quite out of sympathy with the better element. Now, Mr. Crisler, try some of this water. If it doesn't help your insomnia then our experience is worth nothing. Why, Mr. Crisler, it's good for everything. The well belongs to the city, too; and if your organization decides to locate here I can promise you that you can draw on it as much as you want, at a purely nominal rental. If you have any trouble, I'll see to the city council; and"—he laughed genially—"you won't even have to give me a block of stock for it."

Crisler was afraid he might have to show his good faith by drinking some of the water on the spot; but he got away at last and walked downtown with George Blades. It appeared that Mr. Blades had no second-hand Fords and Mr. Crisler eventually decided to rent a new one from the local Ford agency, Blades promising his influence and that of Pence if there were any difficulty over the terms. Blades, too, lived at the Pershing House, but he was going on to the garage; so they parted at the hotel and Mr. Crisler congratulated himself si-

lently on having learned a good deal this evening that would be of use to him—including something about Clay Sellers.

Blades, at the garage, heard from Rufe the repeated story of Flint's backdown before Sellers and his office boy.

"And that ain't all," Rufe finished "This Rexford went home with him; Sellers says he's goin' to let him sleep in the attic so's he can take care of the premises. You get that?"

"I get it. Not much doubt what premises he's going to take care of."

"Not a bit. And Sellers is just the man that would be picked out—looks bad, George."

"Something else looks bad," said Blades. "Pence is going to try to sell the Miller place to this fellow Crisler—you know, the bird that's looking for a sanitarium site. So you've got to tell Raney there's nothing doing for the next week or so. If this Crisler goes to prowling around——"

"Raney can fix things," Rufe declared. "Good enough, anyway, for somebody that's only lookin' for a sanitarium site. But if anybody was lookin' for something else—George, you've got to make Pence attend to this Rexford."

"You darn fool, how can I put Pence up to anything now that Flint's fallen down? Pence has always been careful. You know if he gets leery——"

He paused.

"Yes," Rufe encouraged him. "If he gets leery, what do we do then?"

"Why," Blades supplied with a chilly smile, "we move on, taking our sheaves with us. As we've done before."

Rufe's cross-firing eyes glowed malevolently.

"As we've done before—but this time things are different. You're playin' your own game with the Pences, where I can't sit in. Bridge parties and dinner dances at the Country Club; all Rufe is good for to them people is a little bootleggin'. And gettin' ready to get married, and all. If you let me down, George——"

Blades' pale, unblinking eyes stopped him.

"I can take care of myself, Rufe—even against you. But no use cuttin' each other's throats. Why shouldn't I get married? We're both progressive business men, Rufe; good and settled down. I could have been mayor if I'd had time to give to the job."

"Yeh," said Rufe. "That was good."

"So," Blades concluded, "we needn't ride each other. What we want to do is to figure out how to get Mr. Sellers and his office boy."

"Yeh," Rufe agreed. "And we want to do it quick."

## CHAPTER IX.

For all Bill Rexford's amazing luck and unexpected security he slept badly that night. It was hot and stuffy in the upper half story of Sellers' old brick house, and though the cot was as comfortable as anything Rexford had slept on for a year, he lay half awake for hours listening to the blended unceasing noises from the busy garage across the street—the honk of cars arriving, the pur and rattle of cars departing, the incessant tap-tap of hammers on metal in the sheds behind. Perhaps it was the noise that kept him awake, perhaps his speculations on this strange Clay Sellers who had taken him up and given him shelter, comfort and companionship for no intelligible reason. Rexford would work for his pay but Sellers was overpaying him none the less. He didn't need an office boy nor a librarian. He might have taken Rexford in because he wanted company, but the reason didn't seem altogether plausible. He might have done it from Christian charity, but Rexford's experience made him doubt that. He might have some dark reason of his own.

Speculating on this Rexford eventually fell asleep, his dimming consciousness full of jumbled images—Henry F. Carpenter reading him the will and adding some offensive and unnecessary remarks about the prodigal son, and husks, and swine; wheat fields baking under the Kansas sun; icy streets in Chicago, with Rexford one of a mob laboring with pick and shovel; Colonel Hollis putting up a front at his dinner table; Herb Pence, fat and red and infuriated, weakening as his girl laughed behind him; white arms sweeping in long rhythmic strokes that made a fine art of washing windows——

Then dreamless unconsciousness, from which the rattling alarm clock woke him at half past six. And he had swept the office and the sidewalk, burned the contents of the wastebasket in the gutter under Rufe's malignant glances from across the street, watered the lawn and dusted the furniture before Clay Sellers appeared and told him that it was time to go down to the lunch counter for breakfast.

"This town insists on giving me food," Rexford protested as he put on his hat—or rather Clay Sellers' hat, his last year's straw. He was already wearing Sellers' clothes, and looking better in them than Sellers ever looked; altogether, he was beginning to feel like a pampered favorite of the harem.

"There are some," said Sellers, "who'd like to give you strychnine. And I wonder why."

Rexford didn't believe this at all. He saw no reason why anybody in Hollisburg should be interested in a lawyer's office boy, now that Frank Flint seemed to have given up his dark intentions. But as a matter of fact Bill Rexford became, before the day was over, the topic of conversation for a good many Hollisburgers. And even at this moment he had already occasioned anxious thought to no less a person than St. Elmo Pence.

Mr. Pence, too, had spent a bad night. He had gone to bed under the irritation of his son's querulous complaints against this impertinent tramp who had dared to insult him in the hearing of George Blades—and of Ruth Hollis, though Herb hadn't mentioned that; against Clay Sellers, enemy of law and order, who introduced bad characters into the town and lent them the support of his legal knowledge; against Flint, the craven officer who had let Sellers bluff him out. St. Elmo Pence at first hadn't shared his son's animosity against these persons but he found himself facing a fact that grew more disturbing every moment—the fact that Herb had come to his father instead of settling this thing himself. For a long time St. Elmo Pence had passed over his son's shortcomings with the easy observation that the boy would learn as he got into things; but there were some elements of leadership, evidently, that the boy would never learn. Herb would inherit a million or so; as majority stockholder he would become president of the bank, of which he was already second vice president; his money would make him a big man in Hollisburg. But the autocratic Pence dynasty would die with its founder.

For the first half hour after he went to bed it was this uncomfortable fact that tormented Mr. Pence; after that he began to worry over the equally plain and equally unpleasant reflection that the dynasty wouldn't die out. Hollisburg would still be a one-man town when he was gone, but the one man would be George Blades. St. Elmo Pence knew his daughter as well as he knew his son. They both took after their mother. Leila was as weakly amiable as Herb was weakly provocative. She would be putty in the hands of this pale-faced, pale-eyed, inscrutable George Blades, who had come to town—from California, it was understood—a couple of years before and already had beaten his way into the front rank of the men who managed Hollisburg. Once in control of the money that Leila Pence would inherit and Blades would rule alone. If he needed to do it he could manage Herb as easily as he would manage Leila.

Until this struck him St. Elmo Pence had always admired Blades. He was a brisk, busy, up-and-coming business man with plenty of good ideas and lots of pep. What else was he? He danced well, played a good hand of bridge and a respectable game of poker, knew how to talk to the women. He worked hard in his garage and made an amazing lot of money. What else? Nobody knew. Of his past, of his feelings, of the aspirations that lay behind those pale unblinking eyes nobody knew anything. Not even St. Elmo Pence, who ought to know all about the man who was going to marry his daughter and step into his shoes. But it was too late to ask now. He had accepted Blades on his chamber of commerce record and his standing as a business man who made money and put it in the bank. He couldn't go behind the returns.

Yet he wished he knew more about Blades, and about Rufe, who had come to town and picked up a job in Blades' garage a week after it opened and had been a sort of misshapen shadow of his boss ever since. Rufe ran the garage when Blades was out in local society. Rufe got the bonded bourbon which Blades passed around to a few carefully selected friends. Rufe had no friends; he stuck to the shop. There was no occasion for anybody to dislike him unless—as was reasonable—they disliked his looks. Still St. Elmo Pence wondered just what sort of establishment Leila was going to marry. Herb, now, would marry Ruth—the daughter of that pompous old dead beat up on the hill—and if her sour face and taciturnity meant anything she would make him uncomfortable. That was Herb's affair. He had asked for it. And yet St. Elmo Pence knew that marriage with the Hollises would add something to the dignity even of

the Pences; the son of the man who had made the town would marry the daughter of the family which had let it slide into decay, and everybody—not only the old families on the hill, but the street-corner loafers, even the business men who cheered most heartily for the new ways of Elmo Pence—would say that he had married well.

Altogether, Mr. Pence wasn't getting the satisfaction out of life that a constructive business man and civic patriot had a right to expect. And since he couldn't remake his son's character at this late date, or investigate George Blades' past after he had slapped him on the back and welcomed him into the family, his resentment transferred itself from his son and his future son-in-law to the men who had set him thinking about these unpleasant topics.

Clay Sellers—Pence despised and distrusted Clay Sellers, yet Clay Sellers survived. He was lazy; he was unprogressive; he was cantankerous. But he was a smart lawyer; so smart that he now and then supplemented his steady but slender income from the law business of the old families on the hill with a big case from one of the leading citizens of the new generation. They turned to Sellers only in desperation, but he usually won; he had even beaten Sammons & Blythe. And for a long time St. Elmo Pence had felt a faint remote uneasiness because there was one man in Hollisburg who openly despised him and his theories of life and still made a living. It was unnatural; it was an affront to the deity who had made St. Elmo Pence and must be proud of him.

Why should Sellers need an office boy? Obviously, he didn't. Why should he take up with and protect a tramp who had been told to keep out of town? Something wrong about this; something secret and suspicious. Pence would have to find out about that in the morning; Sellers mustn't think he could turn Hollisburg over to the criminal classes. But shortly after this sleep caught Mr. Pence off his guard, and a fine morning and a good breakfast sent him down to the bank in a cheerful mood which had no room for Clay Sellers.

Nor, in spite of Herb's dismal frowns, did he think about him again till lunch time, when he and Herb went up to the chamber of commerce with Jim Harby, the cashier, and found that Blades had saved places for them at the corner table. The four often lunched together and exchanged gossip of the morning; so it wasn't unnatural that Blades should presently make the casual observation that he had seen Sellers' new office boy sweeping out this morning.

"He worked like a bo who needed his hand-out bad," Blades added. "And it looks as if he got it. Sellers took him down to Cullen's for breakfast; and I hear he sleeps on the place, too. You'd think Sellers had hired him for a night watchman. Must have a bad conscience, or something."

"I tell you, that fellow's a crook," Herb burst in. "Both of them, like as not; but I mean this so-called office boy. I ought to have beat up on him yesterday; that would have sent him on his way without any trouble. But because the girls were there I didn't like to make a fuss."

"Lucky you didn't," said Blades sardonically, "if he's under Sellers' wing. I'd let him alone, Herb."

From the next table Cal Truman called across to them:

"Who's this you're talkin' about? Sellers' office boy? Say, it's queer about that fellow. He's got a Phi Chi pin."

"What?" All the lunchers within earshot sat up and listened.

"He certainly has. I stopped in at the tailor shop this morning to see if Nick had a suit of mine cleaned yet and he showed me one that Sellers had just sent down. Belonged to this tramp—stained and dirty and a devil of a mess altogether. But under the coat lapel was a sure-enough Phi Chi pin. 'I see it's like the one you wear, Mr. Truman,' says Nick, 'so I thought I'd ask you if I'd ought to send it back to him right away or wait till the suit's done!' So I took a good look at it. William Rexford is the name on the back—Columbia, '22."

"Rexford," said Blades. "That's the name he gave when Flint lit on him last night."

"Must have stolen the pin," said Herb. "Likely the suit too."

"He doesn't look like a tramp," said young Norman Kane stoutly. "I saw him at the lunch counter this morning. He had on some decent clothes and he looked like a regular guy."

"Sellers is as good a Phi Chi as any of us," Jim Harby interjected. "He gave two hundred dollars for the new chapter house—biggest piece of money he ever let go for anything in his life, I guess. He wouldn't take in a man with a stolen pin."

"If he knew," Herb finished. "Something queer about this."

Somebody had to clear up the situation and St. Elmo Pence was used to clearing up situations.

"I'll attend to this," he announced. "I'll speak to Sellers about it myself. If this man's a thief, I take it even Sellers would turn him over to the law."

A chuckle floated in from the doorway.

"There ain't many lawyers deserve that compliment," Sellers observed, grinning at the crowd. There fell a thunderous silence. Sellers belonged to the chamber of commerce, but he didn't lunch there twice a year; he ostentatiously preferred Dan Cullen's. Yet to-day he had apparently come for lunch, for he found a place alone, at the bottom of the long table in the middle of the room, and poured himself a glass of water before he asked:

"Who's this thief you're speakin' of, Mr. Pence?"

St. Elmo Pence cleared his throat and his beak nose seemed to creep a little nearer his undershot jaw.

"Sellers, who is this young fellow you call your office boy? I have good reason for asking you the question."

"I don't doubt it, Mr. Pence. His name's Rexford—Bill Rexford."

"Where does he come from and why is he here?"

"Why, as to that," said Sellers, attacking a plate of beans and looking up between mouthfuls, "he's here to work, and he come here immediately, from the water tank west of town. He was en route from some place to some place else when they threw him off a freight, and he had to walk in. Or, anyway, that's what he tells me."

"I don't suppose he's a Phi Chi?" Pence persisted.

"What?" Sellers swallowed another mouthful of beans. "Oh, yes, he's a Phi Chi. I tested him."

"Are you sure?"

"Test him yourself if you don't believe me."

"I don't belong to the fraternity," said Pence stiffly.

"That's so," Sellers apologized. "I forgot you never went to college. Well, let Jim Harby there test him; or Herb."

There was a moment of silence while Hollisburg's business men looked at each other uncertainly; then Cal Truman spoke up:

"Well, tell him he left his pin in that suit he sent down to Nick's to be cleaned. Nick showed it to me this morning."

So Sellers had made one convert—perhaps more.

"What's he doing in Hollisburg?" Pence asked in a tone which tried to be genially, even hospitably, curious about a prospective settler.

"Workin' for me."

"Do you know anything about him?" Pence persisted. Sellers straightened up and looked at him reproachfully.

"Mr. Pence, it's enjoined in the ritual of our fraternity to lend aid to brothers in distress without askin' 'em impertinent questions. For all I know he may be on the road because he's writin' a book on sociology. It's been done; and there are certainly things in Hollisburg that would amuse a sociologist. Or he may have other reasons. Anyway, I ain't bothered him with pryin' questions, because brothers are supposed to act in a fraternal manner. If you don't believe me, ask anybody around town here that got his job, and holds it, because he's a Phi Chi."

A number of people hurriedly lost interest in the conversation and turned to their food; but young Norman Kane, who wouldn't have to hunt a job for two years yet, and who took his fraternal duties more seriously because he was still in college, put in when he saw that Pence had no more to say:

"Well, Clay, as long as he's one of us you might take him around and introduce him to the gang. I guess none of us that fired a furnace for our room rent in college, or slung hash for our board, care a damn whether he's your office boy or the only son of your rich uncle."

## CHAPTER X.

That night the regular weekly dance at the Country Club brought out all the young people of Hollisburg, and a few of the older people who danced well enough to have kept it up after the craze of a few years back had passed. Herb Pence and Ruth Hollis arrived a little after nine in the bright-blue car, and attached themselves to a group which had collected during an intermission on the wide veranda overhanging the river. And here was Leila, who had driven out earlier with Blades; and she greeted Ruth with:

"Well, I suppose Herb's told you all about his tramp?"

"His tramp?" Ruth asked, for since she had had Rexford as a dinner guest she had been thinking of him as her tramp.

"The one we passed in the road yesterday. My hat, hasn't he told you? Why, it's all over town."

Ruth glanced at Herb, who stood frowning, with his hands in his pockets.

"It takes news a long time to get up on the hill," she said lightly, "and Herb didn't tell me. What about his tramp?"

"Why," Leila began, delighted at this unexpected chance to tell the story all over, "it seems he's a Phi Chi from Columbia. His name's Rexford. He's working for Clay Sellers, or at any rate living with Clay Sellers—Sellers calls him his office boy, but I guess that's just kidding. Anyway he's beating his way across country doing odd jobs so that he can write a book about sociology. Sellers said so himself. Isn't it thrilling?"

Ruth nodded. It certainly was—for she suspected that a writer on sociology might find a good deal of interest in the Hollis household.

"Norman Kane and some of the others went around to see him this afternoon," Leila went on, "and they say he's all right. Funny sort of fellow, Norman says; didn't talk about his book; says he's just Sellers' office boy. But he lives in New York and he's going back there this fall. Norman asked him to come out to the dance to-night but he said he was too tired. You know, I thought when we passed him in the road that he didn't look like a real tramp—didn't you?"

"Why, I didn't think much about him," Ruth admitted. "But he had supper with us last night——"

"What?" Leila gasped; and Herb gasped too. Over Leila's shoulder George Blades was looking at her with sardonic speculation; and Ruth surmised that he must have known why Rexford had climbed the hill. So she added hastily:

"We didn't know who he was—father picked him up on Main Street and sent him up to cut the grass. He'd been trying to get somebody for weeks, but all the men that used to do odd jobs have gone to work in the glue factory. And then father came home before he finished and got to talking to him and saw that he wasn't—what he seemed to be; so he asked him to stay for supper."

"Well, my word!" Leila was frankly envious; for a new man in Hollisburg—a new young man, who was handsome and could dance, and who came from New York—was such a rarity that it was something of a social distinction to have seen him first, even if he did look like a tramp. The Hollises, Leila reflected rather resentfully, could tell who was somebody, no matter what clothes he wore; as for her, he might have stayed a tramp forever for all she would have known. Ruth had put one over.

"Then you know all about him," Leila continued.

Ruth shook her head.

"He talked to father nearly all the time—about the crops, and the tariff. He seemed to know a good deal about them and he——"

As the piano and drums started up inside Herb laid a possessive hand on her arm.

"Come on," he said gruffly. "We want to dance this one."

Halfway around the floor he grunted:

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"Why should I have told you?" she demanded coolly. "He was father's guest, not mine. Did you go around to see him with Norman Kane?"

"I did not! And I won't, either. I don't care if he is a Phi Chi—he came into town as a tramp and he still looks like a tramp to me. And George saw him sweeping out Sellers' office this morning."

"That's an awful crime, isn't it? Because if he'd been up on the hill he could have seen me sweeping out—oh, yes, I know that's one of the things we don't talk about; but you know I do it. You've seen me."

"That's different."

Ruth wasn't so deeply flattered by this remark as she should have been.

"Maybe it is," she agreed, "because I'm not writing a book about it. So you're not going to greet the new frat brother?"

"He's no frat brother of mine," said Herb firmly. "He may belong, all right, but lots of bums get into any fraternity. He was a tramp when we passed him in the road yesterday morning, and even if Clay Sellers took him in he's still a tramp. What's he doing, anyway, working for Sellers? Something mighty queer about it."

Ruth was growing angrier every moment. She cared little about Bill Rexford; any

sympathy she might have felt for him had been dulled by the fact that he had seen the Hollises in their poverty-stricken shame. Unintentionally he had touched them on their sorest spot; and even though it wasn't his fault she found it hard to forgive him. But it was equally hard to forgive Herb for his bitterness—a mean quality; the sort of quality she wouldn't like to have around the house, to face at the breakfast table for the rest of her life. And though nothing had been said she knew that things had gone so far, with her and Herb Pence, that it was very likely that she was going to have him around the house.

"Why didn't you knock him down yesterday?" she asked suddenly.

"Didn't think he was worth it."

"But you told him to keep out of Hollisburg, and here he is."

"Do you want me to go and beat up on him?"

Well, of course Ruth didn't. She didn't even wish that Herb had beat up on him yesterday. She didn't know what she wanted; so she was silent, with cold anger, as they strolled out on the veranda after the dance ended.

"Let's walk," said Herb irritably, lighting a cigarette. They went down into the path along the river, which here had broadened into a long still pool. A full moon hung over the southern hills and it was hard to stay angry in this night which was a symphony of pale silver, deep green and black. Ruth's hand slipped automatically into Herb's arm as they fell into step and Herb couldn't know that she was thinking about the moon, and Debussy, and life at large. He supposed, naturally, that she was thinking of him.

So, as they stepped into the shadow, he swung about suddenly and caught her in his arms. She stood passive as he kissed her—so coldly passive that it discouraged him more than a blow. He released her with a growl:

"What the dickens is the matter with you to-night?"

"More than any other night?" Ruth asked.

"You know what I mean. You've let me kiss you before."

"Well, I let you kiss me just now, didn't I? I had no choice. You're a little unexpected, Herb. Maybe some ladies like it, but I don't."

"I thought——" he began, then subsided into a muttered: "Oh, hell." After a moment of silence she asked wistfully:

"Herb, why can't you be kind to people?"

"Who? This Rexford? Now see here, what do you care about him?"

"Nothing. But I've cared something about you——"

It was a golden opportunity for a young man who knew how to take it. But Herb answered stubbornly:

"Well, if you care about me you know what I'm like and you can take me or leave me. This is a clean, live, hustling town; and do you know how dad made it that way? He ran out all the riffraff that had been hanging around before he came. He put Frank Flint in office and cleaned the place up. He kept out the tramps and got people to work. And when I see a tramp I'm going to tell him where he gets off; and I won't run around and beg his pardon afterward just because somebody finds out he wears a Phi Chi pin. Do you suppose Norman Kane would have run around to shake hands with this fellow if he hadn't been a Phi Chi? I should say not. Nor Cal Truman either. And I say a bum's a bum no matter what kind of a pin he wears; and we know what to do with bums in Hollisburg."

Ruth laughed.

"Well, are you going to do it? You had a chance on the road yesterday. You'll have a chance next time you meet him on the street. Are you going to run him out of town?"

"Never mind what I'll do to him," said Herb obscurely. "Wait and see. What I want to know is why you stand up for him."

"It is strange, isn't it," Ruth agreed, "that anybody in Hollisburg should dare to stand up for a man you're down on."

"Well, I won't have you doing it, do you hear? Oh, I know you've never said you were going to marry me, but you've just the same as said it. And if you think I'm going to have my wife sticking up for all the ragtag and bobtail that comes looking for a hand-out, you're wrong. In my position I can't afford it. You know what I think and you——"

"And I can take you or leave you," said Ruth. "All right. I leave you. You and your position too."

And she swung about and walked quickly back to the clubhouse.

He was at her heels in a moment, puffing.

"Ruth! What the devil—where are you going?"

"Home," she threw back over her shoulder as they mounted the steps to the porch. It was empty; everybody else was dancing. Ruth walked on, without looking behind her, to the girls' cloakroom; and at the door he reached out and caught her elbow.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"What I said." She was calm, almost nonchalant; rather sullen, perhaps, but not much more so than usual. "I'm going home—alone."

"You said you'd leave me. Do you mean you——"

Ruth drew a light blue cape—like all her clothes, the made-over relic of something else—over her shoulders.

"I mean it," she said and started for the door.

"Wait till I get out the car," Herb insisted. "You can't walk back to town."

"It's only four miles. I won't lose my way, with a full moon."

He hesitated and while he hesitated she made off down the driveway. Herb stood uncertainly in the door. The shock had rather stunned him; though she'd never expressly promised to marry him he had taken it for granted. In Hollisburg, a Pence could take everything for granted.

The music stopped; he couldn't let himself be caught here by people who would want explanations. Much better to pretend they had driven away together; then there would be nothing to explain when this had all been settled. For, because it was the easiest and most comfortable thing to believe, Herb believed that when Ruth got over her mood it would be settled, and easily.

So he started up the car parked under the trees outside the clubhouse and drove off down the road. In a moment he caught sight of her, striding along with a steady grace in the moonlight. He drove up behind her, slowed down, ran past, and stopped.

"Get in," he commanded. Ruth strode on; the car followed slowly.

"Look here," Herb called. "Do you want to make us look like a couple of idiots, with the car trailing you into town?"

"You don't have to trail me."

"Well, I will."

"All right," said Ruth. "We probably are a couple of idiots and we might as well look like it."

He crept along by fits and starts, now guiding past her before he could check the car, now following a hundred feet behind; but she said no more. And when at last they reached the first houses he swore viciously, put on speed and shot past her. Herb couldn't stand being laughed at.

It was lucky for Ruth, however, that he had trailed her to the edge of town. So long as he was close behind her consciousness had no room for anything but her anger. When he drove on and left her alone she had time to think. For a year past she had had no occasion to worry about the future, because it was understood that she was going to marry Herb—Herb, and the First National Bank, and the real-estate development corporation, and the flood-insurance company. She had really liked him last summer, when he came back from college—a college where there had been richer and more brilliant men to keep him in a wholesome obscurity. She had liked him well enough to give at least a tacit consent to the understanding that some day they would progress through formal engagement to marriage.

But a year back home had had its effect on Herb Pence—a year of Hollisburg where his father was the autocrat and he was the heir apparent. For months she had seen him steadily becoming more opinionated, more stubborn, more disagreeable. At first she had tried, with such subtlety as she could command, to keep him human; but months ago she had given up trying. That was the worst of it—she no longer cared enough to try. She had been taking him as he was until to-night, when she realized that she must forever take him as he was, or leave him.

And the thing she hadn't been able to think of while he was close behind her came up and stared her in the face as she strode on, less vigorously now, through the streets of the town. What was to become of the Hollises, buried beneath their impossible burden of mortgages, if she didn't marry Herb Pence?

All at once Ruth felt very tired, terribly discouraged, and almost frightened. Her father would still be awake, if she went home now; and he would want to know why she had left the dance. She must have time to think; she must stay out till her father was

asleep. And so, because the movie theater had just finished the last program of the night and there was no other place to go, she stopped at Dan Cullen's lunch counter.

## CHAPTER XI.

Bill Rexford sat that evening in the chair on the sidewalk, tilted back against the brick wall and shadowed by the trees, where Clay Sellers had been sitting the night before. He was alone, for Sellers had gone back to the courthouse after supper to delve into the obscure history of a real-estate title; and as he smoked one cigarette after another, listening languidly to the clatter of the busy garage across the street, he was surprised to find that he was lonesome.

There was no excuse for loneliness to-night. Norman Kane had come to see him in the afternoon, bringing two or three other youths with him, and an invitation to the Country Club dance had virtually ratified Rexford's adoption into the younger set of Hollisburg.

He hadn't accepted the invitation to the dance, largely because he had supposed that Sellers would stay at home and might want to talk; nor had he accepted other invitations to come down to the chamber of commerce and shoot a game of pool. But he knew that he would begin accepting invitations before long; he had, in effect, found a new home town. This last six weeks of his year, which only yesterday had seemed so hazardous, was going to be passed in comfort, with an easy job and pleasant company. For all of which he had to thank Clay Sellers, who had saved him from being locked up as a tramp, in order to have somebody to talk to.

But to-night Sellers wasn't here to talk to him and a loneliness that Rexford had fought and conquered when he worked on solitary jobs, or in uncongenial company, fell on him hard in a town which was ready to take him in. To-morrow, if he liked, he could meet everybody; but he wanted company to-night. To sit here alone meant only that he would wonder what to do with his money when he got it; wonder why Sellers had been so kind to him; wonder if Herb Pence would follow the other brothers in welcoming him to Hollisburg; wonder why Blades' garage should be so incessantly and noisily busy; wonder, in fact, about a dozen things, none of which he could settle.

He got up jerkily and strode away toward Main Street. A walk would do him good; a cup of coffee would wake him up. So he walked into Dan Cullen's and found the white-aproned proprietor dozing behind the counter, while a single customer perched on one of the high stools—a girl with a light blue cape thrown over her white frock—was staring moodily at a cup of untasted coffee.

The bang of the screen door behind him roused her and she stared at him blankly for a moment, convinced that her thoughts had come to life. Automatically she nodded, in silence; and Rexford returned her greeting with a shy good humor that she couldn't help finding attractive, even though at this moment she hated Rexford as much as she hated Herb Pence. But she turned resolutely back to consideration of her coffee and Cullen woke up to take Rexford's order.

"Coffee," said Rexford. "Good and black—no sugar."

Cullen drew a cup from the shiny boiler on the counter.

"Ain't seen the police to-night," he observed. "I guess Clay scared them off for good."

"It seems so," Rexford agreed. "I passed Flint on the street to-day and he wouldn't even speak to me. Darned unsociable, I thought, considering that last night he was inviting me to spend the next couple of years in his care."

"Flint's too fresh," said Cullen. "But he ain't a bad fellow to get along with. Trouble last night was, he knew Pence expected him to keep the town clear of tramps; but I guess Pence will let you stay now, eh?"

Chuckling, he moved back to the other end of the counter, sat down, and in a moment was dozing again.

Ruth flattered herself that she was observing Rexford quite unobtrusively. At this moment she hated him because he had been the occasion of her quarrel with Herb. The calmer half of her surmised that in the long run she might be grateful to him, for eventually she must have quarreled with Herb, and better to do it now before it was too late. Just now, however, the quarrel had roused so many disturbing questions that she couldn't help feeling a violent resentment at the man who had innocently started it. From beneath her long black lashes her glance stole back to Rexford

again and again. She had pitied him yesterday because he looked so meek and obscure and bedraggled. But he looked none of those things to-night. Dressed in Clay Sellers' second-best blue serge, with the recovered Phi Chi pin sparkling on his soft shirt, he looked handsomer, smarter, than most of the men in Hollisburg. He had what Ruth supposed must be the New York manner.

Herb, apparently, had set the police on him, but Sellers had got him out of trouble. Another point against Herb; but it didn't make Ruth feel more kindly toward Rexford. This tramp had come to town to pry into the laboriously hidden poverties of the Hollises, to break up her affair with Herb Pence; and after doing an infinite amount of damage both to her pride and to her plans for the future he was sitting here ten feet away from her looking as cheerful as if he had never done harm to anybody in his life.

Unexpectedly she spoke up.

"Yesterday morning," she said in a voice too low to wake the dozing Cullen, "you said that you couldn't see why anybody should stop in Hollisburg. But you changed your mind."

"I didn't know Hollisburg yesterday morning," he apologized. "Since then I've discovered a number of attractions."

"Such as?" Ruth asked politely, confident that he would say something personal and complimentary, whereupon she could put him in his place.

"A steady job," he told her. "Light employment and a comfortable home. That means a good deal to us floating laborers."

"Oh, don't tell me that old story. It was good enough last night, but everybody's heard about your book."

"My book?" Ruth wondered that he could face her so impudently; then looked at him again and decided that he must be in earnest. And there Ruth Hollis made her first concession to Bill Rexford.

"Your book on sociology. Sellers said you——"

Rexford grinned.

"So that's how Sellers explained me away, is it? I thought it was queer that everybody should overlook my past. I suppose they want to get kindly mention. Well, Miss Hollis, don't tell anybody; but I'm not writing a book. Never did and never will."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Working for Clay Sellers—just as I worked for you yesterday or would have worked for anybody else who hired me."

"But why?"

"Simplest of all reasons. I have to eat."

"Well!" said Ruth, smiling in spite of herself.

Rexford sighed.

"I might have known," he confessed, "that that would take all the excitement out of it. If you're working for fun you can do almost anything without losing caste; but if you have to do it most kinds of labor seem to be disgraceful. You have to pick and choose and there doesn't seem to be much choice in Hollisburg."

"So I find," said Ruth in a whisper. Then, hastily, to cover her feeling that she had given herself away, she asked:

"And what do you do when you can pick and choose?"

"Me?" Rexford's eyes were on the cigarette he was rolling; when he looked up it was with a rueful grin. "Why, Miss Hollis, I don't seem to have a profession just yet. I'm a pretty fair farm hand; but that's about all."

"Then," said Ruth, "the other stories about you are made up, too."

"What other stories?"

"That you came from New York, and that you're—oh, quite a person."

"I did come from New York, once," Rexford admitted, "and I used to think I was quite a person. Once upon a time I had expectations; but they dropped out from under me, and here I am."

"But you didn't learn farming in New York."

"Oh, no. I've knocked around a good deal. This job Sellers has given me looks like a promotion, compared with some I've had. I suppose, to live up to the traditions, I ought to study law and get to be a justice of the supreme court. Then people would be proud they knew me when I was sweeping out. Sweeping out is romantic, if it leads to the supreme court; or if you're doing it to get dope for a book on sociology; or if you're doing it for fun; or if you're serving a term of apprenticeship so as to be trusted with father's millions. But there's no glory in sweeping out because you have to."

"I know it!" said Ruth fiercely; and then, angered with her inability to control the feelings she had been hiding all her life, she

laid her dime on the counter and slipped down off the stool. Through the screen door she looked out at Main Street. By the opposite curb stood Herb's bright-blue car; Herb himself probably was lingering in the drug store, waiting for her. If she went home alone he would follow her; and in the town, where they could be seen and overheard, she couldn't suppress him as she had done on the road. So she chose the lesser evil and turned back to Rexford.

"Will you walk home with me?" she asked, in a tone so impersonal that nobody could misunderstand. "There are things on my mind."

They sauntered down the shaded side street, as casual as brother and sister; but Ruth was thankful for the shadows. She walked in silence until they had started up the hill and reached the zone of broad lawns and houses set back out of earshot. Then she said, in a dull helpless tone that caught his sympathy at once:

"I wish I'd never heard of you, or seen you. I wish you hadn't come to cut the grass yesterday. I wish you'd left town last night. You've seen things about—about our house that people aren't supposed to see. Oh, they see them, of course; but they're so used to them they don't notice them. But you've seen more than that—you've seen how I feel about it. Because I'm on edge to-night, upset by something that happened, I've said things that I never said before. Honestly, I feel so ashamed of myself——"

Rexford suppressed the things he would have liked to tell her, and merely said:

"I didn't see anything yesterday and I didn't hear anything to-night—if that helps."

"It helps," Ruth admitted. "But not very much. Why, of all the places in the world, did you pick Hollisburg to settle down in?"

"If it's any comfort to you," he confessed, "I've settled here for six weeks only. Then I'm going back to New York—though probably not to stay. Meanwhile, one reason I like Hollisburg is that I'm a long way from New York. There's nobody here who knew me when."

"And there would be nobody in New York," Ruth mused, "who knew me in Hollisburg. What could I do in New York? What do girls like me do there, who want to make their living but haven't been trained for anything but housework?"

"Why," said Rexford, "a year ago I'd have told you that there were a thousand things you could do in New York. But since I've been on my own I've discovered that there aren't a great many things anybody can do, who hasn't been trained to do anything. I don't want to be a gloom, but I want to tell you the truth. Work isn't as easy as it looks—or as it used to look to me, at any rate, when everybody I knew got a job through his family or his friends, and had so much money he didn't need a job, anyway. And I don't know about girls, because most of the girls I knew were merely playing around till they found somebody they wanted to marry; and they had money enough to keep on playing."

"But you can't do that in a small town," Ruth objected, "even if you have the money. Adele Collins kept playing around till all the men of her own age had got married or gone to the city and then she had a choice between a widower with three children and a boy six years younger than she was. She used to hold him on her lap, when he was a kid. Oh, yes; she married him. I'd like to—go somewhere; do something. But what could I do and where could I go?"

What interested Rexford, of course, was why she was going anywhere; and what she would do with the colonel. Obviously, she felt that she couldn't stay in Hollisburg; which meant that the mortgages were likely to be foreclosed; which meant that she wouldn't marry Herb Pence.

"What do you want to do?" he asked.

"I want to do something honest; something real; something that's my own, my very own particular job that nobody else could do; even if it barely keeps me alive. And something that's worth doing. I'd go on keeping house for my father, of course, if—if we stayed here. But maybe we won't. And I'd like to do something for myself."

They were crossing the street in front of her home, now; and in the light of the arc lamp Rexford saw that she was trembling.

"Well, of course," he assured her, "there are lots of girls who do come to New York without any special training and get somewhere. Plenty of them. I just don't happen to know how it's done."

"St. Elmo Pence's first job in Hollisburg was clerking in a feed store," said Ruth, "and look where he is now. If I could tell you how it was done——"

They slowly mounted the long flight of

steps between the lines of overhanging sycamores.

"You and I both have the right idea," Rexford said cheerfully. "I thought I was going to be a broker once; and I know now that whatever I may turn out to be, it won't be that. I'm still looking for my very own particular job; but the one thing I've learned in this last year is to go on looking till I find it. I think you're absolutely right. I'll tell you—I'll write to a girl I used to know in New York who got tired of keeping house for her husband and started a hat shop. I don't know that she makes any money, aside from what she saves on her own hats; but she knows lots of women who've got their own jobs and maybe she can tell us something."

"That would help me—more than I can tell you," said Ruth simply. Rexford didn't tell her that this was the first fracture of a resolution he had kept since last September—to cut himself off absolutely from all his old friends. He had intended to keep that resolution forever; for a year had taught him that he could get along without his old friends surprisingly well and a man with only twenty-five thousand dollars would never be able to keep up with them. Now he felt that it was the least he could do for Ruth Hollis.

And then they came up in front of the dark and silent house and paused for a moment to look back. The trees of the hillside hid the town, and a soft haze hung over the valley, a moonlit silver screen across its deep green shadows.

"I see one more reason for stopping off in Hollisburg," said Rexford. "And you've had this to look at all your life."

"You ought to see the view from the old Miller place," Ruth told him. "Back on the hill—the finest outlook in the county. I believe Mr. Pence is going to try to sell it to the sanitarium people."

Rexford looked at her fine, troubled face, at her slim figure wrapped in the long cape.

"I wish you'd take me to see it some time," he said.

Ruth looked back at him and smiled. For after all, she was twenty-one and he was twenty-three, and it was an August moon.

"Maybe I will," she said. "I ought to hate you, of course. I've told you things tonight I never told anybody else and never will. I wouldn't have said them, probably, if I hadn't been nervous and off my balance when we met; but—you'll forget them, won't you?"

"All that has passed between us to-night," he assured her solemnly, "is protected by the secrecy of our fraternal order—the Brotherhood of the Broom. You won't tell anybody I'm not a sociologist, will you? Only—I hope we can have another lodge meeting very soon."

"Probably we can," Ruth conceded, smiling. "Do come and see us. I know father likes to hear you talk about the tariff."

## CHAPTER XII.

Rexford found Sellers with his feet on his desk and a corncob pipe between his teeth, reading.

"You're comin' along fast," he observed. "If I'd come home and found you missing last night I'd have supposed you'd been carried off to jail; but now I reckon you must have been out at some scene of revelry."

"Nothing like that," Rexford assured him. He wondered if Sellers, who saw so many things, noticed his agitation; for he was filled with an excitement that couldn't be accounted for by a brisk walk down the hill. Something more than that had quickened his circulation; he felt a vague desire to whip the universe and a complete confidence in his ability to do it. "I've just been out for a walk. Hope I haven't missed any of my duties."

Sellers sighed.

"Never saw such a glutton for work. You go around and talk that way to Elmo Pence and he'll give you a job in the bank."

"Pushing a pen isn't manual labor," Rexford reminded him. "And manual labor is my job. Which brings me to the topic of the evening, Mr. Sellers."

"That ain't my name except in court. Clay to my friends."

"The topic of the evening," said Rexford stubbornly. "Which is that you don't give me enough to do. It's a joke to say I earn my keep by what little cleaning up I do around this place. An hour's work a day."

Sellers grunted.

"I reckon it isn't very exciting——"

"Why, darn your hide," Rexford exploded, "don't you think I don't realize what you've done for me. You've kept me out of jail, set me on my feet, fed me, clothed me—if we lived in the merry old feudal days I'd put my hands inside of your hands and

swear to be your man and go out to make bloody war against your enemies. But——"

"But I've got no enemies," Sellers interrupted, "except maybe the Pences and Blades; and I don't see we'd get anywhere makin' war on 'em. We got Pence's goat by keepin' you out of jail, but I'm afraid that lets us out. No, Rexford, what I need is a listener, not a warlike vassal. I come home all full of thoughts about the freedom of the will——"

"I'll listen to that in a minute," Rexford told him with an earnestness that rather surprised Sellers. "And I want you to know that while I'm around this town I'm on call for discussions and arguments any evening. That isn't gratitude; I like to hear you talk. But don't you see that I can't pretend I'm living up to the conditions of the will with this job? And I'm going to need that twenty-five thousand."

Now Sellers, on his way home from the courthouse, had happened to see Rexford and Ruth, on their way up the hill, as they passed under the arc light at a street corner.

"What for?" he asked. "Last night you didn't seem to have anything special in mind."

"I haven't anything special in mind," Rexford admitted. "But I'll be better off with twenty-five thousand than flat broke, won't I?"

"That seems reasonable," Sellers agreed. "But look here. There's no doubt whatever about the distinction, legal, logical and moral, between manual and intellectual labor. You said you'd had some thought of drivin' a taxi, for instance. Admitting that this calls for the use of considerable headwork, there's no doubt about it's bein' manual labor. Now I've been meanin' for years to buy a car——"

Rexford's jaw dropped.

"No reason why I shouldn't," Sellers persisted irritably. "I don't make much money but I spend a blame sight less. No reason why I should take the trolley out to the Country Club when everybody else goes in automobiles, especially these days when I feel like a swim every morning if I wasn't too blamed lazy to go down and wait for the interurban. But I never drove a car in my life. It would take me at least six weeks to learn and in the meantime I've got to have a chauffeur. If you'll take that on, on top of your other duties——"

"It seems too easy," said Rexford. "Yes, yes, I know that meets the requirements of the will. But it doesn't seem right, after all——"

"After you've been knockin' around the country lookin' for the hardest work you can find," Sellers supplied. "Rexford, I believe you think it's wicked to take life easy."

"Colonel Hollis takes life easy."

"If Colonel Hollis wants a job as my chauffeur he can have it," said Sellers, finding it hard not to grin at this evidence of the direction of Rexford's thoughts.

"But you know and I know, Rexford," he went on, "that there ain't a reason on earth why you shouldn't take this job. Elmo Pence feeds and lodges his chauffeur and pays thirty a week besides. If I keep you at fourteen, as I propose to do, I'm makin' you a downtrodden wage slave and you ought to write a letter to one of these radical magazines about it."

"Your oppressive capitalistic offer is accepted," said Rexford, "on condition that you let me pick the car. I know a Ford and a Sagamore by heart. Anything in between is more or less strange ground to me, but I know enough about engines in general——"

"I admit a Ford is my size and my general preference. But I heard just yesterday that Blades has got a secondhand Sagamore for sale. Picked it up down in Louisville from some fellow that went broke."

"It uses a lot of gas," said Rexford, "but the Sagamore's a good car. I had one, once. Had to sell it when the grand smash came, to pay my debts."

Sellers looked at his watch.

"Only eleven o'clock. I reckon maybe Blades is still out at the Country Club, but Rufe will be there. We'll just call 'em up and tell 'em we'll be over in the morning to take a look at that Sagamore by daylight. It's both sinful and illegal to do business on Sunday but I reckon there's no harm in lookin' over a car to see if you want to buy it on Monday."

He took down the telephone and presently got an answer from the garage.

"Blades there?" he asked.

"Blades won't be back till late," said Rufe's surly voice.

"When I was young," said Sellers, "eleven o'clock was good and late in Hollisburg. But that was before Country Clubs were invented. Say, Rufe! This is Clay Sellers talking. You still got that Sagamore car?"

"Yes."

"Well, I want to come over and take a look at it in the morning. Maybe I'll buy it if the price is right."

"I said we still got it," said Rufe. "Meaning we got it on the premises. But Blades sold it to a dealer in Cincinnati and we're goin' to ship it Monday morning. Hell, you didn't think there was any market for Sagamores in Hollisburg, did you? Might as well try to sell the czar's crown."

"Thus crashes my dream of grandeur," said Sellers, hanging up the receiver. "He's sold it in Cincinnati. Blades does a lot of business there. Well, Rexford, it's got to be one extreme or another. If I can't get a Sagamore I want a Ford. And now, the night bein' far advanced——"

"I'll listen to your thoughts on the freedom of the will," said Rexford, rolling a cigarette.

"Oh, they've plain slipped my mind," Sellers apologized. "Because, you see, the only freedom you've got is what was left you by your grandfather's will. And that's more than most of us have got. Bound to the wheel of destiny. No, I think we better go to bed; but first let's stroll over to the bluelick well and get our nightly appetizer!"

"I must be getting used to Hollisburg," said Rexford as he put on his hat. "That proposal doesn't rouse the horror I would have felt this morning."

As they stumbled toward the well in the darkness of the empty lot they saw before them a blot of white, moving back and forth. It materialized, on closer view, into a straw hat—the hat of a man who was sitting on the platform around the well and fanning himself to blow the sulphur smell away. At their approach he rose, peering intently.

"Why, good evening, Mr. Crisler," said Sellers cheerfully. "I take it you like our mineral spring."

"Thought I'd sample it," Crisler admitted. "Our chemists, of course, report on all the wells we consider; they've got bottles of water from all up and down the valley. But I'm troubled by insomnia; when it gets me I simply have to go out and walk. I couldn't sleep to-night, and happening to smell this local product of yours I thought I'd step over and see if it'd really do me as much good as everybody promised. You're Mr. Sellers, aren't you? I met your whole town yesterday and I haven't quite got names and faces sorted out yet. I don't believe I recall——"

"My friend Mr. Rexford," Sellers supplied. "He had his first drink of this stuff last night and comes back of his own free will for a second. Hollisburg's a very seductive town, Mr. Crisler."

Rexford leaned over and cautiously put his mouth under the faucet, and Crisler, more cautiously, drew Sellers aside and whispered:

"Can you shake your friend? I want to talk to you alone—and out of doors."

Sellers thoughtfully filled his pipe.

"Rexford," he said, "do you realize that this is about the first chance Mr. Crisler has had to open his mouth since he came to Hollisburg? People have been talkin' at him ever since yesterday noon, but since Pence made us a town of sales talkers the art of listening has pretty well died out. Now I, bein' a bad citizen, am curious enough to pamper Mr. Crisler's insomnia. I'd like to set down with him here on this platform, under the silent moon, and find out what he really thinks about us and our water. But I don't want to keep you up."

"I was going back to write a letter, anyway. Have to get it out to-night."

And Rexford faded into the blackness as Sellers sat down on the boards around the spring.

"We're as out of doors now as you can get in the city limits," he said. "I infer from your demeanor that you've got something highly secret on your mind. You're welcome to what I can tell you; but first maybe I better supply a gap in your knowledge. I don't belong to the gang in this town; I don't like them and they don't like me. I disagree with their philosophy of life so blamed much that—I assure you there's nothing personal in this, Mr. Crisler—that I don't care a hoot whether you locate your sanitarium here or in Adamsville."

Crisler laughed silently.

"I've heard all about you, Mr. Sellers. That's why I've been waiting out here for the last hour and a half. They told me you came out to the well every night, and what I've got to say to you I don't want to say in your front office, where anybody can see us talking together. I'm likely to need a lawyer here and from what I've heard I'll need you; for I expect to have some business that may not be so easy to handle through your—er—courthouse crowd."

"If your sanitarium company needs legal advice this early——"

"Mr. Sellers, I don't know any more about a sanitarium than you do. I'm an investigator. Oh, well—call me a detective if you want to. The sanitarium's only a false front. I'm down here in the interest of some automobile-insurance companies. As you undoubtedly know there's been a regular plague of car stealing all up and down the valley--Adamsville, Vernon, Mt. Tabor—every town, with the curious and suggestive exception of Hollisburg."

Sellers clasped his hands over his knees and grinned up at the moon.

"Go on," he said.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Rexford found the composition of his letter to Marian Selden a good deal harder than he had expected. It meant the re-establishment of contact with a world which he had resolutely tried to forget in the past year, for he knew that he wouldn't get very far in it with twenty-five thousand dollars.

He rewrote the letter a dozen times before he finished it just as Sellers came in, and started out to mail it at the box on the corner.

"You're keepin' late hours," said his employer severely. "Just for that I sentence you to sleep till ten o'clock to-morrow. Then after breakfast we'll go out and swim at the Country Club—only not in the costume you wore when I first saw you."

"I hope Mr. Crisler eased his mind about Hollisburg," Rexford suggested politely; for he had been too much preoccupied with his own affairs to speculate about the business which had kept Sellers at the blue-lick well for more than an hour.

"Oh, yes. He told me quite a lot. It would surprise you, Friend Rexford, to find the stimulating comments that can be passed on your home town by a stranger. He showed me a lot of things that had been right under my eyes, and I never saw them. Well, well, we live and learn. Ten o'clock to-morrow."

Rexford strode down to the corner, whistling. He had done what he could for Ruth Hollis and was only sorry it wasn't more. To have been able to do anything at all pleased him so much that he gave a kindly nod to George Blades, who was just turning into the garage after taking his sweetheart home from the dance, for a last look around before he went to his bed in the hotel. It was a nod such as any optimistic newcomer in a live town might give to a settled and prosperous citizen; and Rexford was much cheered when Blades returned it without perceptible hesitation. The greeting made him feel at home.

Blades stepped lightly into the garage office, whistling, with a cigarette between his fingers and a faint smudge of rice powder on the shoulder of his coat.

"Glad you feel so happy to-night," Rufe growled. "I ain't seen nothing to hang out flags about."

"Rufe, you're a gloom. Why shouldn't a man be cheerful who's been dancing with his girl all evening? Besides, Rufe"—his voice sank to a whisper—"I saw Raney while you were out at supper. Crisler was up on the Miller place this afternoon, but I guess he's got nothing on his mind but a sanitarium. Raney said he went to the edge of the hill and looked at the view and then came back and looked over the general lay of the ground and asked a few questions about drainage. But that was all. And Raney had everything out of sight. He knows how to fix a haystack."

"I hope he fixed the road, too. A man that was lookin' for something might think he'd found it if he saw the treads of four or five kinds of tires goin' into one barnyard."

"Raney thought of that, you boob. He dragged his road with a plank before sunrise; and the only tracks Mr. Crisler saw were the tracks of Raney's own Ford. Anyway, Rufe, it's plain he wasn't after anything."

"I reckon not," Rufe conceded. "But this other bird—Rexford——"

"What about him? I met him on the street as I came in. What's he doing up at this time of night?"

"Think I'm a mind reader? I don't know what he's doin'. But I make my guess; and I guess he ain't doin' us any favors. I've kept an eye on him off and on all evening, through that knothole in the board fence. 'Bout half past nine he went down the street. Pretty soon I see him come strollin' back, toward the hill, with that Hollis girl."

"What? Rufe, you're crazy."

"Tell me I don't know that Hollis girl when I see her! They come right along the street here; I got a good look at 'em when

they passed the light from the window. She was wearin' a blue cape over a white dress."

Blades sat down and began to laugh silently.

"You win," he said at last. "I saw her in that outfit at the Country Club. She came in with Herb and danced a couple of times with him and then they disappeared. Everybody supposed they'd gone for a little drive in the moonlight; a few even bet they'd run off to Vernon to get married."

"Well, they didn't. Dick was over at Meservy's pool room to get some cigarettes a while ago, and he said Herb had been there most all evening."

"Well, well, well. This is certainly news. First time in his life anything ever went wrong for Herb, in his home town. What will the old man think? Oh, Rufe, this is great."

"Yeah, this is fine, this is. You and your Country Club friends may be all excited about Herb's girl leavin' him flat but what I want to know is what we're goin' to do with this Rexford. He went toward the hill with this girl and then come back a long time after. A while ago he and Sellers both went off down the street; he come back alone. Now he's out again——"

"Rufe, old dumb-bell, you can't scare me to-night."

"Oh, I can't, can't I? While ago, Sellers phoned over. Said he wanted to buy a car. Wanted to look at this Sagamore."

The cigarette dropped from Blades' lips.

"What did you tell him?"

"I done my best," said Rufe gloomily. "Told him we was goin' to ship it to Cincinnati Monday. I guess you can wire Ketzner and fix that end of it, but they can trace the thing to Cincinnati; and if they do that they can trace some more things back to us. George, I tell you we're in wrong. How many has Raney got?"

"Two Buicks and a Dodge."

"I remember. One from Vernon, one from Adamsville and one from down on Sugar Creek. We've got three centuries tied up in them cars; and if anything's wrong Raney can't afford to get caught drivin' 'em down here at night. Some of them farmers might be gettin' up early and ketch him some morning."

Blades lit another cigarette, with returning cheerfulness.

"Well?" he asked. "What's the answer?"

"Pull out, of course—unless we can get this Rexford quick. If we can get him we can afford to stick around till we sell out. If we don't we got to go."

"And leave our plant?"

"Plant!" Rufe spat contemptuously. "Pence owns the building, don't he? We can afford to leave our stuff. And if we fool around here much longer—I told you, George, it didn't pay to work these hick towns."

Blades again was laughing silently.

"Rufe, if I didn't get any more fun out of our game than you do I'd go into the ministry, where I could pass my grouch on to the congregation."

"All right. If you'd done eight years in San Quentin maybe you'd see things my way. I never had any friends to get me paroled. And if they ever catch up with you, you'll do four years beside——"

"I can take care of myself," said Blades.

"Yes, but we've done better together than either of us ever done alone. We're a good team, George. I'm all right for the rough work and you can do the society stuff. We ought to go to Chicago. This town is too dead. But Chicago, or Detroit—some place where you could get goin' again among the rich dolls—you can always get them, George."

"Lord, yes. Remember that one at Santa Monica. I came near marrying her, too. Marry and settle down."

"You'll settle down where there's neither marryin' nor givin' in marriage if you don't do something pretty quick," Rufe persisted. "Meaning San Quentin, unless Michigan City gets first call."

"And all you can think of is to do something to Rexford."

"That won't fix everything but it will give us time to turn around."

"It won't fix anything. If Sellers is in on this he's the man to look out for. But he isn't popular in this town, Rufe. And if we got Rexford, I think maybe we could stop Sellers before anybody came to take Rexford's place."

"Who'd stop Sellers?"

"The man higher up."

"Meaning Pence? I thought you said we couldn't——"

"Rufe," said Blades thoughtfully, "do you realize that we cleared eight thousand dollars last year, aside from our trade in used cars?"

"Yeah. What of it?"

"That's a lot of money, in Hollisburg. Lawful money."

"Split two ways. Besides, I don't aim to live and die in Hollisburg."

"It might be fixed so you'd own the garage by yourself."

"You marryin' the Pence girl and takin' the rest of the town, I suppose. That would be a fine split, wouldn't it? Look here, George, if you figure on anything like that you want to remember I get my percentage."

Blades' eyes lingered on him, coldly.

"There's no percentage to get, at present," he observed. "But give me a little time—and I might swing Pence. Provided, of course, they didn't have anything on us here. We've got only one car here now, besides this damned Sagamore."

"That old Overland Raney picked up in Vernon, the night the sawmill burned. That was a fine haul, that was."

Blades slapped his thigh.

"Rufe, we'll turn that Overland in to Flint to-morrow and tell him we suspect it's stolen."

"Are you crazy?"

"Not a bit. Tell him the bill of sale don't look right and we think the license plate's been changed."

"It certainly has," Rufe grinned. "Didn't I dump the old one off the bridge?"

"I can fix a story that will fool Flint," Blades asserted. "And that will cover us for a while. Then we can clean everything up."

"How about them three in Raney's haystacks? We can make three or four hundred on 'em if we turn 'em over now, through Ketzner. More if we wait and sell 'em off here."

"Too risky" Blades decided. "Shoot 'em off to Ketzner as quick as we can handle them. Oh, not right away, of course. Got to make sure this Crisler is through with his nosing, first. But as quick as we can. And then——"

"And then we can sell out, pull out, or stay. I think old Pence would cover us if there was nothing on us here; and there isn't much chance they can trace any old stuff back to us unless something happens to Ketzner. I know Pence is careful; he'd hate to swallow it, maybe, if anything came up. But I can work him."

"I ain't so sure about that," Rufe persisted. "You can work the women but——"

"Leila can work Pence. Don't you worry about that, Rufe."

"What'd we do about Raney?"

"Raney could go back to working into Louisville, the way he was doing before we came. Raney's a piker. He'd never give us any trouble."

"I don't want to spend the rest of my life in this town," Rufe protested. "And we're such a damn good team, George——"

Blades smiled complacently.

"Pence and I will be a better one."

## CHAPTER XIV.

After breakfast on Sunday morning Colonel O. P. M. Hollis came out on the front porch, in shirt sleeves and slippers, and settled down in his rocking-chair to read the Cincinnati *Enquirer*. The colonel was at his best on Sunday mornings, when he rested from the labor of composing the history of Hollis County, just as any historian or man of affairs might rest after a hard week's work. Seated on the porch of his ancient mansion, overlooking his extensive grounds, he gathered round him something of the vanished magnificence of the great Hollises long dead; his Pittsburgh stogy sat between his teeth with the dignity of a Corona Corona. He smoked, and read, and reflected on the destiny of nations and the follies of mankind; and never heard the clatter in the kitchen, where Ruth was washing up the breakfast dishes.

Presently, her work done, she appeared in her plain blue frock, just as the colonel had lifted his eyes from the newspaper to wonder what was the unfamiliar feature of the landscape which his subconsciousness had been trying to call to his attention for the past quarter of an hour. Somehow, things didn't seem the same; yet the house was still here, the trees, the yard—— Ah, that was it! The grass had been cut. And this raised another question, which was not without its alarming aspect.

"Ruth," said the colonel, "we never saw anything more of the young man who cut our grass. He said he'd call at the office the next day to get his money——"

His hand stole furtively to the trousers pocket where a dollar, borrowed from Jim Harby, had jingled pleasantly all yesterday morning and half the afternoon. But there was only a quarter now; the rest had gone for stogies.

"I guess he was too busy to drop in," said Ruth absently. "He got a job—working for Clay Sellers."

"My dear child! What conceivable sort of employment could Clay Sellers give him?"

"I believe he was hired as office boy and general handy man. There's quite a story about him."

"I judged so. Obviously he wasn't what he seemed. Good blood will tell, my dear. And what is the story?"

Ruth told it as Hollisburg knew it, till she came to the last point. After all, Rexford had asked her not to tell anybody he wasn't a sociologist, and the colonel would be sure to hear it. Yet she wondered if it wasn't a streak of meanness in her that drove her to add:

"And Sellers said he was writing a book about sociology—tramping to get material. It may not be true, of course."

"I should think it's very probable," the colonel observed. "First-hand information—get down to facts before you draw your conclusions. It's a fine thing, Ruth, that our young men are learning to be thorough. A fine thing, too, that young men of the better families are going in for serious intellectual effort. It wasn't so when I was young. Far from it. Business—politics—very degraded politics, too, in the 'eighties—those were the fields that attracted the ambitious young men, even of the best stock. A great misfortune, Ruth. It vulgarized the nation—destroyed the finer values. Those of us who tried to hold to the old traditions were too few.

"So he got right down to bed rock, did he? Worked with his hands. That's the right idea, Ruth. Tolstoy knew the peasants because he'd worked as a peasant. When critics of this young man's writings set out to tell him anything about labor, he can answer them, 'Gentlemen, I know labor. I have labored!' Yes, my dear. A fine thing. If he's going to be here in town we must see more of him. I thought he talked very sensibly, for a young fellow. We may be gratified, I think, that we were the first to entertain him in Hollisburg. We ought to have him up here again. Very fortunate, I think. Why, Ruth, the art of decent conversation has pretty nearly died out in Hollisburg except for Clay Sellers, who's so infernally peculiar that you can't do anything with him unless you suit his whimsies. But this young Rexford talks well."

As Ruth remembered it, Rexford listened well; but she was used to her father's habit of reshaping the rough facts of existence into something more decorative. And just now she wasn't much interested in Rexford. There was a more important matter on her mind. She had lain awake half the night thinking about it and wondering how to tell her father. But of one thing that sleepless pondering had convinced her—she couldn't and wouldn't marry Herb Pence. The quarrel had been only the climax of a long period of increasing strain, in which she had accepted his attentions with growing sullenness, and Herb had steadily become more irritable and overbearing as she cooled. It was time to stop, and she wouldn't begin again. But—what next?

"Father," she said, "I'm not going to marry Herb."

The colonel laid down his newspaper with considerable clatter; folded his spectacles and thrust them into his trousers pocket; straightened his tie, and looked at her with the solemnity of a patriarch presiding at the family council.

"I never heard officially," he observed, "that you were going to marry him. But that is the fashion of the time. I'd taken it for granted, like everybody else. So you're not?"

"I'm not."

"I don't want to pry into your affairs, my child; but young people are swift to decide and prone to change their minds. I suppose there has been a quarrel—a little tiff——"

"Oh, yes, we had a fight at the dance last night. Oh, not a real fight, no blows, or anything. Just a quarrel."

"These things sometimes settle themselves," said the colonel in the tone of a supreme-court justice citing precedents. "When the heated emotions of the moment have cooled——"

Ruth sighed, weary and disillusioned. But she wouldn't let her father—even her father—dragoon her back into this, now that she had realized she wanted to get out.

"Oh, I cooled off last night. I'm still cool this morning. And I hate him worse than ever. He just won't do!"

"This is your serious and considered decision?"

"Yes, father, I'm afraid it is."

The colonel got up and ceremoniously embraced her.

"Then, daughter, this is the happiest day of my life. I wouldn't raise a hand to hamper your desires; you seemed to like him when he came home from college, and I stood aside; but if you've made up your mind I don't mind telling you that I've always considered him a most unmitigated bounder. Yes, my child. A bounder. The product of a vulgar family, flourishing in a vulgar age and—God forgive me that I should have to say it—in a vulgar town. Hrrrrmph! Forty years ago there was no room in Hollisburg for people like the Pences. Thank God we're not going to have them in the family."

Ruth couldn't choke back a sob of relief. Her father might be ridiculous sometimes but he was right—right—all right. However—he wasn't very practical.

"It won't be so easy, of course," she reminded him.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, father, there's no use pretending we aren't poor; and there's no use pretending the Pences aren't rich. And what we're going to do——"

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that. Something will take a favorable turn."

"But, father——" Ruth hadn't realized how hard it was going to be to talk business with her father, for the first time in her life; but it had to be done. "But, father, those mortgages on the house and the Hollis Building that you've given to Mr. Pence. You've heard him say, haven't you—I know I have—that he never forgets a friend or forgives an enemy. And from what I've seen of him I suppose we'll be his enemies from now on. If I'd married Herb——"

"Ruth, be silent. I will have you understand that petty questions of business, sordid details of finance, are to have nothing to do with my daughter's marriage. She bestows her hand where her choice may happen to fall. Good God, do you think I'm running a slave market?"

He was genuinely angry and Ruth was deliriously happy. For the first time in their lives she and her father really understood each other and respected each other. Still, that wouldn't pay off the mortgages.

"But—oh, father, you're a dear! But—and I want you to know I'm not going to marry Herb ever, for any reason—but how are we going to pay off those mortgages?"

The colonel waved his arm.

"Give me time, child. Give me time."

"How much time have you?"

Reluctantly he came back to dates and figures.

"One of them falls due on the first of October," he recalled.

"That's only two months."

"A great deal may happen in two months. After all, we're not destitute, you know. There are the lots on Whitcomb Avenue."

"You couldn't get two hundred dollars for them. Why, last year you almost let them be sold for taxes."

He turned on her sharply.

"How did you know that?"

"Herb told me. He said his father had lent you——"

"Bounder! Whippersnapper!'

"I think I began to hate him then," Ruth admitted.

"Our real-estate holdings aren't so valuable as they used to be," the colonel admitted more thoughtfully. "If something happened to restore the popularity of the hill streets it would be another matter. But everybody wants to live in Pence's Addition. However, my dear, much may happen in two months. Hrrrmph! Before long I hope to push my history of the county to completion. I've taken my time over it——"

"Thirty years," Ruth thought despairingly.

"And I have no doubt it would prove remunerative in the hands of a publisher who knows his business. The older families of this part of the State would want it, of course; but it should command a wider public. An epic of changing times, painted on a broad canvas. Well, well, daughter—we shall see. At any rate, I'm glad you're rid of that young whelp."

There was a pause.

"But we might as well make up our minds," Ruth persisted, "that we'll have to get out. Oh, very well, if you'd rather—that we may have to get out. And I've been wondering how we'd live. Father, I want to go to work."

"Work?" The colonel's hands shook as he stared at her wildly. "Work? Good God!"

"Oh, not here, of course. For I thought if we had to leave the house we'd have to leave Hollisburg, too. I don't want to stay around here where everybody can see us. And we'd have to live on something, father."

I know I haven't any training, but I could find something in New York, or Chicago, or even Indianapolis."

"No, daughter." The old gentleman had recovered his poise and there was more of instruction than of indignation in his manner. "No, that sort of thing isn't for us. We hear a great deal, of course, in these days, about freedom for women, equality of economic opportunity, all that nonsense —oh, I'm not bigoted; I grant you that for women of a certain sort, who've been deprived of an opportunity to lead normal lives, it may be possible. But not for us. They talk about their careers; but say what you will, the noblest career under heaven, the one for which woman was ordained by almighty Providence, is making the home.

"I flatter myself that our family, whatever it may have lost, has always preserved the finer graces, the elegances. And they can't be preserved in the hurly-burly of the business world. Why, Ruth, you don't understand what business is like. The routine of an office—the sordid details of a trade—making money or perhaps losing it—— No, no! A brave thought, child; but it won't do."

"But lots of girls just as good as I am are doing it."

He smiled at her.

"Where is the logic in that, my dear? Because some of the old stock, in these disturbed times, break away from the old tradition are we to be freed from our obligation to our code? And, granted that girls as good as you are go into business, what does it make of them? Greedy grasping for money, rubbing shoulders with men whom you wouldn't invite to your home, coarsens a woman; it rubs off the bloom. No, no. None of our women have ever worked."

He delivered that last word in a fine ironic tone; and Ruth looked at her hands calloused by the scrubbing brush and coarsened by dishwater, at her broken finger nails that no amount of polishing could make as pretty as Leila Pence's. And she remembered family traditions of the migration of William Hollis and his family across the mountains, to build his log cabin where the courthouse stood now and fight off the Indians while he and his companions cleared the woods away and planted their corn. If William Hollis' wife hadn't worked with her hands, all history was a lie. But, then, she had worked in the home.

The colonel had turned back to his paper and his stogy. Ruth wanted desperately to continue the argument; to make it clear to him that something would have to be done. But it would be useless. The colonel was what he was. She couldn't change him. Like Herb, she would have to take him or leave him; and of course she wouldn't leave him.

A few minutes later she was playing in the parlor, and the colonel recognized the second act of "The Love of the Three Kings," in a piano arrangement which Leila, who had heard the opera in Chicago, had brought home for Ruth. The child played well, he reflected; but, thank God, not up to a professional standard.

Work! The terrible word rang and echoed in the colonel's ears. It assaulted him again and again in the crescendos of Montemezzi's music that Ruth was playing indoors. The colonel knew the story of the opera—an old family that had run down, like the Hollises; a young girl of this ancient line who had married the son of a self-made man, a young barbarian almost as crude as Herb Pence, though with a nobler nature. But the old barbarian, the father, was as ruthless as St. Elmo Pence. He had killed the girl. Thank God Ruth had escaped that; their dying stock wasn't to be dishonored by crossing with thorns and thistles. But with St. Elmo Pence an enemy instead of a prospective kinsman the finances of the Hollis family were going to be terribly upset. Something would have to be done.

Work! No doubt the cares of the household sometimes weighed rather heavily on the child, but that was woman's sphere. To go into an office, to go cringing to a window for a salary envelope every Saturday night, to have to dispute with men over the petty trifles of business, a nickel profit here and a dime loss there—no, his girl was too fine for that. She had a gallant spirit, but it wouldn't do. If anybody must work——

The colonel gripped the arms of his rocking-chair like a passenger on a tossing ship. His face was drawn, his eyes glazed. The specter that had pursued him all his life, always lurking behind him, darkening even his serenest moments with its sinister shadow, had caught up with him at last. Work! He had once thought of studying law, when he came home from the university. He could remember his father, sitting

in this very armchair: "No, Oliver, not the law. Petty chicanery—unfit for a man of rectitude. Politics? My dear boy, what attraction do you see in the politics of this year of our Lord 1881? Corruption—vulgarity—venal office holders and a debauched electorate. I'd be in Congress yet if I could have stooped to muddy the springs of public life. This country, Oliver, is unfit for a gentleman to live in; and if we have to live in it, we can refuse all responsibility for it."

So he hadn't studied law. He had striven to show the public an example of the gentleman and scholar, holding himself aloof from the struggle with a refined blending of tolerance and disdain. And his position and character had received recognition. He had cast an electoral vote for Harrison, another for McKinley. He had served on the governor's staff. He had more than once addressed the State Historical Society. But then he had had a position and an address—Colonel O. P. M. Hollis, Elm Street and Hollis Avenue, Hollisburg, Hollis County, Indiana. After October the house would pass to Pence. They would no longer have credit at the grocery. They would have nothing. Ruth mustn't demean herself by earning her living; but if she didn't——

The music had stopped. The colonel's clutch tightened on the chair. He must protect his daughter, take care of her. Work! He knew something about the law, from his reading; but the statute had been changed; nobody could be admitted to the bar, now, without a legal education. Could he go down into the business world himself, accept the presidency of some corporation, associate himself in a strife of wits with competitors, perhaps with fellow directors, over money? In that competition the least scrupulous usually prevailed. There would be sharp practice. He could hear his board of directors telling him to do something his conscience disapproved. "No, gentlemen. I am not accustomed to that sort of thing. If the standards of your president displease you, seem a little impractical, you may have my resignation."

That was what it would come to. He couldn't do it. Write leading articles, perhaps, for a newspaper. But that meant daily attendance at an office, or at the very least submission to the orders of men imbued with the ideas of this modern age that the colonel would not stoop to understand. He wouldn't like it. And would it leave him time to complete his history of Hollis County?

As he had told Ruth, it was more than the history of a county. It was the history of an age, of a civilization. When published it would astonish the country. As millions suddenly read and admired Henry Adams who had never heard of him till his autobiography was published, so millions would discover Oliver Perry Morton Hollis. They would realize, when they read his work, how far America had drifted. He would give them pause. Already he could see the reviews: "As Gibbon described the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, in pages that will live till time gives place to eternity, so Hollis has depicted the decay of Middle Western culture——"

He had written two hundred and seventy thousand words. To complete the work on the scheme he had projected he must write two hundred thousand more. Impossible to do that with the cares of business hanging on him, or in the daily grind of journalism. Should his life work perish, unfinished, because of the petty demands of immediate comfort? Were the fleshly needs of the author to deprive America of the reproof and correction which this work would give? No. Ruth would understand. He was a scholar and a man of letters and his life work came first. He must complete the history even at the cost of some personal sacrifice. He must end his life as he had lived it, on a high plane, with no concessions to circumstance. He could do nothing else.

And anything might happen between now and October.

Presently Ruth came out, a Panama hat on her head and a black cloth bag swinging from one wrist.

"I'm going out to the Country Club for a swim," she said.

The colonel sighed. Only loose-living young men had gone swimming on Sunday when he was young; but customs had altered in this as in other things.

"I haven't seen the car," he remarked, and then looked at her, startled. He had forgotten that Herb and his car and so many other things were no longer part of their lives.

"It does seem funny, doesn't it?" she smiled. "I'd got terribly used to him. What luck we had a quarrel! I'm going out on the trolley and I'll like it just as much. Good-by, father."

He watched her tripping down the steps, then lit another stogy and went back to the Sunday paper.

## CHAPTER XV.

The Hollisburg Country Club wasn't very lively on Sunday mornings. On Sunday afternoon it was always crowded with golfers, tennis players, swimmers, dancers; but though in these modern times most people were lax in church attendance a feeling still survived that if you didn't go to church on Sunday morning you ought to stay at home, sprinkling the lawn, tinkering with the car, or even reading the Sunday paper. There was no harm in getting a little pleasure in the open air on the Sabbath, but not till after dinner. The few Sunday-morning habitués of the club were wicked bachelors who had never gone to church and were believed to drink. As a matter of fact they usually rowed away up the river to fish, or played bridge in one of the upstairs rooms. Still, it was generally felt that before noon on Sunday the club was hardly respectable.

But that didn't disturb Ruth Hollis. She wanted to be alone this morning, after that irritating and futile discussion with her father. She wanted to swim; for in swimming, alone, she usually found a lazy physical comfort that was somehow soothing to the soul. And there was no danger that any of the idlers at the club would annoy her with a companionship that she didn't want; for people didn't do that sort of thing to Ruth. She knew that most of Hollisburg thought her morose and uncompanionable. Perhaps she was; but it had its advantages on mornings like this, when she wanted to be alone with her thoughts. And she, at any rate, could swim alone at the club on Sunday morning without making talk. There was that much advantage in a reputation for unsociability.

As she changed her clothes in the bathing house she reflected that even this pleasure would be taken away next year, if they stayed in Hollisburg. The club dues were only five dollars a year, thanks to an endowment provided by St. Elmo Pence; but where she and her father could find five dollars, after their mortgages were foreclosed, she didn't know. However, that was next year; and this was a fine summer morning when a good-looking, healthy girl of twenty-one couldn't stay blue very long. She ran out into the open, climbed to the highest of the three springboards, did a perfect twenty-five-foot swan dive into the pool, and swam away downstream.

The last of her worries gradually drifted away from her as the warm water rippled around her shoulders and the sun shone hot on her red cap. Perhaps her father was right; something would turn up. And at any rate it didn't matter just now, for it was beautiful weather, and she was young, and she had got rid of Herb Pence forever and ever. It gave her the shivers to think that yesterday evening she had still been looking forward to a lifetime spent with Herb. Brrrh! She drove on with quick crawling strokes, sprinting for a hundred yards till she had Herb off her mind, then turned over to swim lazily on her back.

The pool was broader, here, and flanked by slanting banks of concrete, with the marks of earlier and higher water stages left on them. She was approaching the dam. And, rolling over to look about for landmarks, she saw a wet shiny black head thrusting above the surface only a few yards below her. Bill Rexford, treading water, was looking at a sign on the bank which read: "Swimming beyond this point is positively forbidden. By order of the County Commissioners."

Ruth laughed and he turned over to face her.

"I didn't think I'd see you so soon," she said, wondering why she couldn't think of something clever and original which might impress a traveling New Yorker.

"No; isn't it luck?" he agreed. "You see, Sellers brought me out here and then after he'd been in the water for five minutes somebody called him in to take a hand in a bridge game. And I thought I'd do a little exploring. Is the sign to be taken seriously?"

"No," she informed him. "Not now. In flood time, of course; but now the water level must be forty feet below the spillway, and the flow to the sluice gates won't bother you."

"Your lawlessness is charming," he said. "Being within sight of the dam, I gathered that much. What I wanted to know was whether they arrest people who swim on down the pool? I've already had trouble with your police."

"Well," said Ruth cheerfully, "I'm going to swim down to the dam. If you want to

come along and see what happens to me why——"

They went on down together, swimming silently and at first slowly. It was Ruth who quickened the pace and then swam on faster and faster as he kept up with her without apparent effort. With the single exception of George Blades she was the best swimmer in town; and an effort begun in mere high spirits was continued when she found herself suddenly determined not to let Rexford beat her. But he did beat her, drawing ahead with unexpected ease as they came into the shadow of the concrete wall that rose, all but perpendicular, fifty feet above the water. She came up to him, breathless, and clung beside him to the iron ladder that rose from the bottom of the reservoir to the parapet high above.

"Pretty good," she gasped.

"I couldn't have done it," he said, "if I hadn't had a year of toughening with the pick and the pitchfork. Are you done up, or would you like to take me up the ladder and show me the sights?"

Ruth was done up but she wouldn't admit it, even in the prospect of this vertical climb.

"Go ahead," she said. "I'll be right at your heels."

It wasn't easy, but they both made it and presently found themselves on the concrete roadway, twelve feet wide and walled in by parapets, along the top of the dam. Off to the left, near the end of the dam, the concrete dropped suddenly ten feet, leaving a broad spillway for use in time of flood, with an iron bridge carrying the road across it. On the other end was a little concrete cabin, the gatehouse at the top of the tower in which was the machinery of the sluices.

The concrete was hot under their bare feet as they crossed to the farther parapet and looked down the outsloping face of the dam to the river, passing out through the lower sluices, seventy feet below them.

"We used to have a flood every spring till this was built," Ruth told him. "Sometimes the water came clear over Main Street; what's Pence's Addition now was always under. But that's all over and done with since the reservoir was built. It was a great thing for the town—only a little bit hard on people who owned property on the hill."

"It gave you a good swimming pool, anyway," said Rexford. "Must be more than a mile long."

She nodded.

"When I was a little girl, just learning to swim, we used to have to hunt miles up and down the river for a swimming hole, in summer. But this is great."

He grinned at her genially.

"I'll say so."

They regarded each other, squinting in the bright light, but smiling. Nobody would know, to-day, that they both plied the broom for a living; in the democracy of the swimming suit they belonged to the aristocracy of the young and graceful. Ruth had taken off her rubber cap, and the breeze stirred her curly bobbed hair; Rexford wanted to run his fingers through it. Hastily he said:

"Only one thing needed to make it perfect—I wish I had a cigarette. Do you suppose there's anybody over there in the engine house, or whatever you call it, who would be charitable?"

"There's nobody there but a watchman," said Ruth, "but he'd be charitable." She knew, for he had once worked for them. And they found him seated on the shady side of the gatehouse, an elderly man in brown shirt and trousers.

"Hello, Peter," said Ruth. "Mr. Nash, this is Mr. Rexford. He wants to borrow a cigarette."

"I got the makin's," Nash offered. Rexford accepted them, and rolled one.

"How's everything?" Ruth asked.

"Ain't so bad. Twenty-eight foot of water this morning. Most we ever had in August. And the fish bit pretty well before the sun got so high."

Rexford blew out a puff of smoke and laughed.

"Is that all you have to do—measure the reservoir and then go fishing?"

"Oh, no," said Nash reproachfully. "I got to mind the sluices."

"They're kept open all the time," Ruth explained.

"Now, Miss Ruth, that's true, and again it ain't. There's three pairs of them gates. Go around back there and you can see the upper ones and the middle ones. The lowest pair is kept open all the time, but when it's high water we need the others."

Ruth peered around the corner of the gatehouse, and down.

"Peter, you're bluffing. The water's twelve feet below the middle pair."

"Yes, but we might have a spell of rainy

weather, or something. Winters and springs, when the water's high, there's three of us here all the time; but in summer the county saves money—one at a time's enough."

"My idea of the perfect job," said Rexford.

"Well, now, it ain't so easy as you think. Got to go down through the inspection gallery in the very bowels of this here dam once a day. Climbin' up and down ladders at my age—and it's damp inside there for a man with a touch of rheumatism. Ain't so bad for me, at that; I live back here on the hill and I go home nights. But Crissey, that's the night man, he says he's goin' to quit. Says it's too lonesome here all by himself, with nothin' to do but play solitaire and listen to the bullfrogs. He sent word to the county commissioners they'd have to give him an assistant, so's he could play seven-up, or else pay him more money, or he'd quit. I ain't heard what they done about it. No, sir, this is a lonesome job and it ain't every man that's got the heart to stand it. Well, so long, Miss Ruth. Mighty glad you're lookin' so well. My respects to the colonel."

"There!" said Ruth, as they tiptoed away on the hot concrete. "Why don't you get the night watchman's job, instead of working for Sellers?"

"There's a good deal to be said for it," he admitted. "But not enough labor in it for me."

"You sound as if you like work."

"No, it isn't that. I——" He stopped; he had told one resident of Hollisburg about that will and that was enough.

"Yes," said Ruth. "Go on. I know there's something back of all this, even if it isn't a book on sociology. Because if you're a Phi Chi you could get better jobs in town than Sellers could give you. I know it's none of my business——"

He sat on the parapet, looking at her quizzically.

"It's nothing much," he said. "I just had to promise that I'd put in a year of manual labor before I tried anything else."

She knew this wasn't all but it was evidently all he was going to tell.

"And it's spoiled you for being a broker," she added. "What a shame!"

"Not at all. Broking for those who like to broke; but not for me. I'm almost inclined to become a farmer; I like it."

Ruth considered him very soberly.

"I think you're an awfully good sport," she announced. "Because it means so much more to like something like this, when it's been dropped on you suddenly—I mean, it's not as if your prosperity was so far back in ancient history that you never knew what it was like—so that it sounds like the 'Arabian Nights' or something."

"Luck," he assured her. "I happen to be fairly strong and I happen to like simple harmless occupations like pitching hay. But I can think of a lot of men I used to know, who, if they'd been turned out to manual labor as I was, wouldn't have liked it and could never have liked it. The gentleman who wished it on me thought it would be a good stiff penance for all my sins. Manual labor, with no money back of it—making a living by manual labor—was the worst punishment he could think of. And for most fellows like me it would have been. Only I can't help thinking that he probably isn't getting much fun out of heaven if he knows that I happened to take to work."

Ruth laughed—a long musical peal that died away suddenly as it sounded in her own ears. For she was reflecting, with wonder, that she hadn't laughed like that for months. She had never laughed like that with Herb; such laughter as he provoked was ironic or contemptuous. There was no doubt about it—it was beautiful weather and there was no use worrying about troubles that wouldn't be acute till October.

"You'd think we were the only people in the world who had ever used a broom, to hear us talk," she observed. "But I suppose at twenty-one we all think the world owes us a lazy man's job. Oh, well! That's a nice dizzy ladder, but I can climb down it without a tumble if you can. We'd better be getting back to the club; I have to go home and start dinner."

## CHAPTER XVI.

Sunday was of course the busiest day of the week at George Blades' garage. This particular Sunday seemed likely to be particularly busy, so far as could be judged from the early-morning business; and Rufe, overseeing the colored boys, was accordingly distressed when Blades, who lived at the hotel, made a casual appearance shortly after ten o'clock in white flannels, silk shirt and Panama hat. It was plain that he didn't mean to do any work this morning.

"Where the hell are you goin'?" Rufe demanded.

"Me?" Blades grinned. "I'm going to church with my girl and her family, like a good citizen."

"You're gettin' to be too much of a good citizen," Rufe grumbled, "to keep your eye on business."

Blades lit a cigarette with lazy nonchalance before he shook his head.

"No, Rufe. You're all right, but you've got no—what do they call it?—vision. You can't see ahead of the day's receipts. I'm playing a bigger game; and you'll get your percentage. Say! We were talking about this Rexford."

"Yeah?"

"I think you said you were going to get him."

"*We* said *we* were goin' to get him," Rufe corrected.

"Well, we're not—no, no, don't get hot. Mr. Rexford will be got, all right; but we won't need to do it. Somebody else will do it."

"Who?"

"Leave it to me," said Blades.

"You mean Herb Pence," Rufe conjectured. "Hell, George, he can't blow his own nose."

"You don't know him. He'll fight when he has to. Besides, he isn't just Herb Pence. He's Herb Pence with a million dollars and all the drag of this town behind him. Anyway, give me a little time and I think I can frame something. If I can't, you can try your hand. So long, Rufe. Don't work too hard."

"This is a fine day for you to leave me flat."

"I'm working for the firm," Blades grinned. "And what I expect to do is a trifle more important."

Mr. Blades dutifully appeared at church with Leila and St. Elmo Pence—Herb was staying at home, as usual. Mr. Blades also sang the hymns with fervor and in general displayed an enthusiasm that, twenty years earlier, might have persuaded the congregation that he had been well saved. In these modern times Hollisburg was more skeptical. If a young business man who was going to be married suddenly displayed an unexpected enthusiasm for religion, church-going Hollisburg gave the credit to his girl and didn't expect his zeal to last long after the wedding.

However, St. Elmo Pence went up to the bank after church to look over his mail—a weekly habit—and Blades walked home with Leila through Pence's Addition.

"Something's the matter with Herb and Ruth," she told him. "He's cross as a bear this morning. When they drove off last night I thought they were going to fix everything up—you know Ruth is stand-offish. But evidently they didn't."

Blades laughed silently.

"They certainly didn't. I don't know what happened, but Ruth came back to town, early, by herself. And Sellers' office boy took her home."

"What?" This was too much for Leila.

"It's a fact. A man who doesn't make mistakes saw them and told me."

"Well, I never! George, he'll never speak to her again."

"Won't he? You know Herb."

"Well, Herb's proud, at any rate," said his sister. "He wouldn't take anything like that."

"Wouldn't he?" Blades looked at her wistfully. "I'd take worse than that from you, if there was any chance of getting you back."

"Oh, well"—Leila's glance was amorous enough to suit anybody—"we're different. And I'm so glad, George. You know, I never could understand Ruth. People think I'm her best friend; but she hasn't any friends. Why, she never told me a thing; and I used to tell her everything. Oh, no; I don't any more. But she was always close-mouthed and prissy. I don't believe she ever cared much for Herb."

"She wouldn't be such a fool as to chuck him for good," Blades suggested.

"She might. You don't know her, George. She isn't like anybody else. I always feel that she's laughing at me. And goodness knows what right she's got to laugh at anybody, living up there in that ruin with her old puff of a father."

"So you think she's through with Herb," Blades mused. "Well, well. Then how about us?"

"What about us?" said Leila archly.

"You put off naming a day," said Blades, "because we figured on a double wedding. But if Herb and Ruth are off—little lady, I'm crazy about you. You know that—don't you? And I hate to wait any longer."

Leila walked on with eyes downcast. Then:

"So do I," she admitted breathlessly. "If —if you want to——"

"I want to," said Blades. "Oh, I know we haven't built our house yet."

"Pooh! What difference does that make? Father will give us that corner lot—we know that. We can get married and then build the house. Anyway, you know he'd like to have us live with him; his house is big enough for an army. We can do that while we're building our own."

"You're the most wonderful girl in the world," said Blades, wondering why some literary person didn't invent new phrases of love-making to vary the monotony. You had to say the same thing to all of them—rich or poor, married or single.

"You're kind of wonderful yourself," Leila admitted shyly. "I'm so sorry for Herb."

"Well, don't rub it in on him," Blades counseled. "We can leave him to himself."

However, when Blades and Herb were smoking on the porch after two-o'clock dinner—St. Elmo Pence having retired to his study to look over the Louisville and Indianapolis papers, and Leila being engrossed in one of her interminable telephone conversations with a girl of her age and set—Blades took a chance on the lack of confidence between Herb and his sister.

"Cheer up!" he advised, grinning over his cigar. "She was only doing it to make you sore."

"Doin' what?" Herb growled, with a pretense of innocence.

"Letting the office boy take her home."

"What?" Herb sat up with an unaccustomed suddenness. "Now you tell me just what you meant by that!"

"Why, I supposed you knew. After you and Ruth had your row last night——"

"What do you know about that?"

"Not much. But I know that when your girl comes to town alone—by trolley, I suppose—and then lets this Rexford pick her up on Main Street and walk home with her——"

Herb swore with fluency and enthusiasm. He said things about Rexford and things about Ruth—things that Blades himself, in the height of anger, would hardly have said about anybody. There was a limit to all things. But when Herb had sworn himself out he descended suddenly to a rather piteous:

"Gosh, George, do you think she means it?"

"Ask me," Blades evaded. "I never could make the girl out."

"Well, neither could I. She's queer. But damn it all, I want her. Yes, I know you think I'm a boob, and probably I am. But I want her. George, you heard her say he'd been up at her house for dinner. What do you make out of that?"

Blades admitted that he was puzzled.

"He went up to cut the grass," he explained. "Sellers sent him up as a joke on the old man—you know their front yard. At least, that was what I thought. But I'm not so sure now. Something queer about that fellow, Herb."

"There certainly is."

"Of course, he seems to be a Phi Chi," Blades went on. "I don't belong to your frat, so I don't know whether he is or not. I've heard of a guy picking up a pin and getting hold of a password or two—has anybody investigated him?"

"Sellers."

"Oh!" said Blades ironically. "Sellers, eh? Well, that's different."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't mean anything. But, Herb, it looks mighty queer to me. What does Sellers want with an office boy? We saw this bird on the road and he was a hobo. No doubt about that. Ruth saw him, too. She doesn't run to hobos or office boys, anyway. Something wrong."

"Sellers said something about a book."

"So he did. Well, maybe that's it. Not that you'd think anybody could write a book about Hollisburg, but I guess maybe one of these soreheads that like to knock small towns might do it. And if he wants to get any knocks I imagine Colonel Hollis would be the one to hand them out."

"You think that's it?"

"No, I don't; for Sellers wouldn't have said it if it had been true."

"No, the dirty knocker."

"I don't know what it is," Blades went on. "Sometimes I've thought—well, you know a lot of cars have been stolen down the line, at Vernon and Adamsville. Whatever you say against this Sellers, he's a tricky lawyer; and if a man from down there got in trouble——"

Herb nodded.

"Rexford looks as if he might be mixed up in something like that," he agreed. "But then——"

"Well!" Blades shrugged. "I don't know

who he is or what his business is. Only if a girl of mine had chucked me and gone right from me to him, I'd—oh, well, Herb, I don't believe she meant to chuck you. After all, we all know about those mortgages."

"Uh!" Herb growled. "We'll see."

Later in the afternoon he found his father alone, in a hammock on the lawn.

"I suppose you've heard the news," said Herb doggedly.

"What news?"

Herb told him and was half pleased, half angered at his father's look of relief.

"Well?" said St. Elmo Pence. "What of it?"

"I'll show her," Herb vowed.

"I should think," said his father, "that you'd be glad to be out of it. What did you ever see in her, Herb? At my age I can judge a woman by something besides her looks and her dancing; and I must say I never saw anything in that Hollis girl. Sullen—conceited—thinks she's better than everybody else, living off there on the hill with that old dead beat of a father that I've kept for the last ten years. Let her go."

Herb shook his head.

"I'll show her," he said. "Oh, yes, I know you think I'm wishy-washy and all that; but I'm not. I know what I want. I want her —I want to show her who's who around here. Teach her not to laugh at us."

"Us?" said St. Elmo Pence.

"Oh, she's always saying something mean and sneering about the way things are run around Hollisburg. Never comes out in the open."

"Ah! I guess her father puts her up to that. The old windbag! Wait till October, Herb. I'll set them right out in the street; then we'll see if anybody else will pay for their keep, when I've quit. Only—I don't like bringing her into the family."

"Well, I'll show her," Herb insisted. "And this Rexford. What do you suppose he wants to write in a book about Hollisburg? There are lots of knockers these days that think it's clever to rip up the small towns."

"I know it," said St. Elmo Pence. "Think that's it?"

"It might be that. It might be most anything else."

"Well, son, I'll stand by you. And so will Frank Flint, if you get anything on this man Rexford. Only be careful. And—there are other fish in the sea, son."

"I want to make this one feel the hook," said Herb vindictively.

## CHAPTER XVII.

The news that Ruth had broken off her affair with Herb didn't get around immediately. Neither Pences nor Hollises felt like talking about it; and George Blades and Bill Rexford, the only other people who knew, kept silent for their own reasons. But a dozen people had seen Ruth and Rexford swimming together on Sunday morning; a hundred people had observed that neither she nor Herb appeared in the afternoon. When Monday night came and all Hollisburg flocked to the movie theaters to see the opening bill Herb was there and Ruth wasn't. Then Hollisburg began to talk.

But Hollisburg had a good deal to talk about already. On Monday morning Clay Sellers, who had resisted automobile salesmen for twenty years, went down to the Ford agency and bought himself a new touring car with all the trimmings; and within an hour after that he was seen on the river road, learning from Bill Rexford how to drive it. That in itself was a considerable piece of news for a quiet summer in Hollisburg; but there was more by noon, when it became known that George Blades had turned in to the chief of police a car which he suspected had been stolen.

The story of his cleverness spread and grew. He had bought it from a citizen of Vernon who had looked all right; the bill of sale seemed to be in proper form; but the license number was later found to have been tampered with, and when he had looked up the seller he had discovered that no such person was known in Vernon. It was rumored that Flint had evidence that a gang working out of Louisville was responsible for the thefts all along the river. As in the case of this car sold to Blades, somebody would come to a town, steal an automobile, sell it in the next town, and go back to Louisville. Everybody agreed that this was smart; but Blades and Flint were smart enough to break up the gang. Hollisburg, talking it over at the chamber of commerce, the Country Club, the soda fountain, came to the conclusion that Blades and Flint would do for Adamsville and Vernon what Adamsville and Vernon hadn't been able to do for themselves. Another triumph for Hollisburg.

On Tuesday afternoon Sellers announced that they would get out the Ford and drive down to Vernon.

"All my life I've been goin' to that town," he explained, "but I never drove there in an automobile. When I go out spinnin' with other people it's always over the hills; along the river you can go quicker by the railroad. But now that I've joined the great majority and own my own car, blamed if I don't feel like goin' down there in state. You got your license all right?"

"Of course. Why shouldn't I?"

"Well, Pence the same as owns the courthouse, and I thought some of them fellows there might be mean to you just because you worked for me. I ain't goin' to apply till I know that car as well as I know the criminal statutes of this State; for if they got a chance to trip me up they'd do it. I know 'em."

They drove off up the river, past the dam and the Country Club; past a cut in the hillside just beyond, where a gang of laborers was at work and the sound of blasting came from near at hand.

"Cuttin' through a new line for the interurban," Sellers explained. "Straighten it out or something. More of Pence's modern improvements—oh, yes, he owns a whack of the interurban stock, too. Greatest man to straighten out the visible face of the earth I ever saw; but when it comes to straightenin' out internal crookedness he ain't so eager. What? Oh, crookedness in others, I mean. Pence ain't crooked himself, consciously. He lives up to his lights, but they're blame dim. In fact, Friend Rexford, he's one of the examples by which I'd prove to anybody that the virtue of sincerity is greatly overrated, if there was anybody but you to listen to me. Trouble with talkin' to you is you're convinced of most sensible things already. I'd rather cast my seed on stony ground than waste it on what's growin' a full crop without my ministrations."

"We haven't had much time to talk philosophy the last day or two," Rexford reminded him. "You seem pretty busy."

"Showin' my faith by my works," said Sellers with a grin. "Yes, I've been busy. But maybe the rush will be over pretty soon. Likely I'll be able to settle down for a good long talk—about the time you go back to New York."

"I suppose I will go back to New York," Rexford admitted. "Have to go, to collect my money, of course; and maybe I'll stay. There's a good deal I like about Hollisburg, but——"

Sellers said nothing; but presently he began to sing in an undertone:

> "The steamboat's comin' around the bend—
> Good-by, my lover, good-by."

And Rexford, wondering if he meant anything, came to the conclusion that if Sellers did mean anything he wouldn't talk about it till he got ready. Of course, Sellers didn't know that Ruth was thinking of going to New York.

Vernon looked very much like Hollisburg, in its downtown section at least; except that it was obviously slower and less progressive. It hadn't had a Pence.

"Now, I've got some business at the courthouse," said Sellers, "and it may take me a couple of hours. Anyway, you might just as well go to a movie and pick me up there at half past four. I suppose we got to lay this car up in a garage or somebody will run off with it."

"Not a bit. I'll just take the rotor out of the distributor and drop it in my pocket; and then nobody can move it without taking a tow."

"Huh!" said Sellers. "If everybody was as careful as you these automobile thieves would have to work for a livin', wouldn't they? Get you together with Blades and Frank Flint and we might solve this mystery yet."

Rexford wasn't much inclined to go to a movie, but there didn't seem to be anything else to do in Hollisburg; so finally he settled down at the local theater and spent a morose hour and a half watching a Broadway film and wondering why anybody migrated to New York when it was so badly misrepresented by the advertisements. Sellers went down, meanwhile, to the courthouse; but he didn't go in. On the steps, by a curious accident, he encountered B. F. Crisler. They greeted each other as casual acquaintances might; and then, since there was nobody in earshot, Crisler grunted:

"This is a nuisance, getting together in out-of-the-way corners. I suppose now we've got to hunt some place in a back alley before we can talk."

"I don't think so. Come around here to this bench behind the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. There—I thought so. Nobody in sight. And if we sit down here for a lit-

tle smoke, nobody will talk about it. Vernon isn't as curious as Hollisburg."

"I know it," said Crisler. "I came down here this morning as accredited agent of a perfectly good sanitarium and nobody but the mayor and the president of the bank paid any attention to me. You live in a live town."

"It'll be liver when you get through with it," Sellers chuckled.

"Maybe. This thing isn't easy. I've checked up on Blades' story. It holds water. So far, he's an innocent receiver and he takes the loss. Things look a good deal worse for him from the Cincinnati end, but there's nothing even there that we can pin on him. Of course, if it were an ordinary case, we could bull right in and find out; but evidently it can't be done that way in Hollisburg."

"Not while Blades is engaged to Pence's daughter," Sellers agreed. "Unless we can make out a pretty good prima facie case all the weight of Pence's influence would be thrown for Blades. And against me. I told you I wasn't the man you wanted."

"You're the only man in Hollisburg I could work with at this stage of the case. Oh, I think we can pin it on him sooner or later; and I suppose if we had conclusive proof even Pence would throw him over. But we'll have to go slowly; we'll have to waste time. And that means that he can get away with quite a good deal more stuff through his other outlets before we can get him. If he doesn't get away himself."

"No use counting on Frank Flint," Sellers warned him. "Or the sheriff. Not till we've got the goods, if then."

"And I suppose there's no use counting on bringing outside pressure to bear, with Pence so strong in State politics."

Sellers removed his pipe and blew a smoke cloud out into the breeze.

"I hadn't thought of that," he observed. "Pence is such a big man in Hollis County that we get to forgetting he don't own the earth. Yes, he *is* strong in State politics—with the legislature. But he ain't so strong with the governor. Pence was for Ott for governor; he kept Hollis County votin' for Ott even on the last ballot, when all the rest of the convention was stampeding for Wimborough. And I imagine that in case of a scandal in Hollis County the Honorable Colfax Wimborough would give Elmo Pence strict justice— no less and no more."

Crisler drew a long breath.

"I didn't know that," he confessed. "Things look better."

"They'll look better yet when you get some real evidence," Sellers added. "And the sooner the quicker."

Crisler nodded.

"If for no other reason," he said, "because we can't keep up this hole-and-corner business much longer. If people are going to see us together they'd better see us together in the open."

"That ain't the only inconvenience," said Sellers, "that I suffer from bein' right across the street from Blades' garage. They keep hammerin' away there all night. I used to wonder why."

"Can you trust your chauffeur?" Crisler asked.

"Why, I reckon so. If I can't there's no such thing as gratitude."

"Gratitude, Mr. Sellers, is mighty scarce. I only thought that this boy has a better chance to see what we're up to——"

"Don't you worry about him," Sellers advised. "I think he's all right; but even if he ain't, he's in wrong with the Pences. Besides, I kind of think he's got a girl on his mind too strong to think of anything else. I don't know him well enough to let him in on this, so he can't be much help to us; but he won't be a hindrance."

"I wish you knew him better," said Crisler glumly. "We need all the help we can get."

They parted and Sellers made occupation for himself about the courthouse until Rexford brought the car around at half past four. Both were silent on the way home; Sellers, indeed, was heavily silent. Because they would have to go slowly, and be very sure of every step, Blades would have time to cover his tracks. He was going to marry Leila Pence; and Sellers, though he knew the curious quirks of the criminal mind, couldn't imagine that anybody who was going to inherit a slice of the Pence fortune could be foolish enough to continue his entanglement in only moderately profitable crime. They would be too late; and Blades and the Pences would continue their reign.

In this mood it annoyed Sellers that he had to store his car in Blades' garage until he could build a place for it in his own back yard. But there was nothing else to do; and he might have felt better if he had known that Blades and Rufe were a good

deal more annoyed than he was. For them, too, there was no alternative; they could think of no plausible and unsuspicious excuse for keeping Sellers' car out. Rexford dropped Sellers at the corner and drove on into the garage, to find himself blocked in the doorway by another car whose driver was arguing fiercely with Rufe.

"What did you have the gate locked for, then? Of course I'd've druv it into the back lot if the gate had been open, but——"

He stopped as Rexford sounded his horn, and looked back—a big man with a shock of bushy yellow hair. Then, still swearing, he got out of the way, and Rexford thought no more of him until he and Sellers came into Cullen's lunch counter for supper to find the bushy-haired one and Rufe just going out.

"Who's that fellow?" Rexford asked.

"The little brother of the Seven Sutherland Sisters? Fellow named Raney. He rents the old Miller place, up on the edge of the hill above town. Why?"

"I saw him in the garage this afternoon. Just wondered."

"Huh! He's comin' up in the world, runnin' up garage bills for that old thirdhand Ford he drives. I hear he mends it with a needle and thread and carries his gas out from town in a milk bottle."

Rexford said nothing, for it was none of his business, and probably it wasn't important anyway. But he remembered that Raney's car that blocked him in the doorway had been a new Dodge.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

By Wednesday Herb Pence's friends were kidding him, with the primitive fierceness that Hollisburg custom still tolerated in such matters, about his girl throwing him over for Sellers' office boy. He took it in sullen silence—ominous silence, since he didn't respond to the merry jestings even of men who were smaller than himself. The truth was that even yet Herb could hardly believe that Ruth was really through with him. He hadn't seen her since Saturday night; one or two telephone conversations she had cut off with the curt statement that she had nothing more to say. And a muddled, angry young man whose whole life had taught him that unpleasant things couldn't be true wasn't willing to believe the inflated stories he heard about her interest in Rexford.

In other quarters, however, romance was looking up. Blades came into the garage office on Wednesday morning whistling a wedding march.

"'S far's that, eh?" Rufe grunted.

"You said it, Rufus. The invitations will be out next week. Married on the twenty-third. I break the glad news to you first, buddy."

"Yeh, that's kind of you. Got it all settled, eh? Where do you live?"

"With Pence till we get around to building a house for ourselves."

"Goin' on a honeymoon?"

"The Thousand Islands."

"Canada!" Rufe's face drove Blades to laughter.

"You've got the worst case of nerves in the world," he said lightly. "Why the devil should I beat it to Canada? Hollisburg is my town, from now on. I settle down and become a leading citizen. So do you."

"Got it all fixed, ain't you?"

"Of course it's all fixed, you boob. I go in with Pence—the real-estate end. You take the garage. Give me notes for it and if you ever pay them you're a bigger fool than I think. Well, aren't you going to wish me a happy life with my charming bride and my thriving father-in-law?"

"Ain't got time," said Rufe. "Just got a call for a repair job on one of their trucks out at the construction camp up the line. They don't want to lose time bringin' it in; said they'd pay me all right for comin' out. Guess if I'm goin' to be sole owner of this here garage I got to cultivate my trade."

But he cursed silently as he drove out up the river in his little repair truck. To the last he hadn't believed that Blades was really going to marry this girl. Of course, there was money in it. That was the worst of the whole affair—it was so sensible. Naturally, Blades would marry half a million and settle down when he got the chance. That it meant the disruption of a partnership that had counted for more than anything else had ever counted in Rufe's life didn't seem to trouble Blades. He went his own way and threw a few scraps of bounty to Rufe; as he could afford. If it had suited his convenience better he would have double crossed Rufe—or, at least, so Rufe thought in his black musings this morning. In their partnership of give and take Blades had done most of the taking and Rufe most

of the giving; yet because they were such a good team they had worked together in a score of cities before they came to this hick town where Blades had been lured away. The older man had feared this for a long time. Blades was smarter; Blades could go about in society; Blades had a way with the women. Rufe was good only for the rough work. But Blades needed him as he needed Blades and they might have stuck together if they hadn't settled in Hollisburg—if it hadn't been for this town, and for St. Elmo Pence, who was going to be Blades' next partner.

By the time he started back to town, his repair job finished, Rufe's first fierce anger had dulled to a sullen cold resentment. He'd show 'em, if they got fresh with him. Thought they could push him around this way and that, did they; make him settle down in this hick burg when he'd been thinking for six months it was time to move on to Chicago.

Where the highway that led across the top of the dam joined the turnpike there was an interurban stop; and Rufe saw a man waiting for the next car, a familiar figure. It was Crissey, the night watchman at the dam; and Rufe, who had collaborated with Crissey in certain low amusements, stopped and invited him to get in.

"What you doin' out here this time of day?" he asked.

"Come for my stuff," said Crissey, flinging a bag into the truck. "I've quit my job. Told 'em last week I'd quit if they didn't give me a helper, or more money; but them tightwads on the county board wouldn't do it. Pence put 'em up to that, damn him. All this talk of economy and efficiency is his stuff, and they wouldn't give me a ten-dollar raise. Let 'em see if anybody else would work out there for sixty-five a month."

"Gets lonesome of nights, don't it?"

"Lonesome? Say! But I don't mind that. It's dangerous. When you take to climbin' down through them manholes and into the inspection gallery with not a soul within call—suppose you fell and broke your neck? Who'd hear you? Who'd care? Not Pence. No, Rufe, it ain't a job fit for human beings. I told 'em. I said to 'em, 'See if anybody else will take it.' If it was winter they'd've come through, mighty quick. But they know in summer there ain't a chance of gettin' enough water in the reservoir even to open the middle sluices, so what do they care? Rather let the thing watch itself of nights than pay a fellow decent wages. You know it's a mean job, Rufe; you been down them manholes with me. It ain't safe, is it? Say, have you got any hooch?"

"Come down to the garage," said Rufe, "and I'll give you a bottle. No, I don't want nothing for it; I can afford to make my friends a present, can't I?"

He certainly could. For Crissey's story had opened up certain trains of thought. He remembered the construction of the dam pretty well; he had gone down through the manholes, inside. And he remembered something else—something he had seen that afternoon at the construction camp. A loosely built board shanty with a big red sign—*Danger—Explosives—No smoking.* And a door ajar, with a rusty padlock clinging to the hasp—a padlock obviously not in use. They'd better be careful what they did to old Rufe.

Clay Sellers, after midday dinner, had told Rexford he was going back to Vernon.

"Got some railroad business down there that's more trouble than it's worth," he explained. "No, don't get the car out. I know what it feels like, now, but I can make it quicker on the accommodation."

"You simply won't let me work," Rexford complained. "Here I've got all your books unwrapped, and sorted out, and settled on the shelves; and I'm halfway through the catalogue. And I don't believe you've looked at one of them since I started."

"Oh, yes, I have. Not intensively, because I've been busy. But I've had time to get surprised at my own extravagance, buyin' more than I'll have time to read in the next forty years. By the way, I see you've got that old copy of 'The Pioneers' catalogued as a first edition."

"Isn't it? I checked up the year of first publication——"

"I picked that up at a secondhand store in Cincinnati," said Sellers, "for seventy-five cents. No man of sense would have sold it for that if it had been a first edition. On the other hand, I wouldn't have bought it if it had cost much more. I buy books for what's in 'em, not for when they were printed. I tell you what—I'll give you something to do this afternoon. Colonel Hollis has got a first edition of 'The Pio-

neers.' Take this one up to the house and check up on it, will you? If I did get more than my money's worth I'd like to know it; it don't often happen."

Rexford concluded that it would be discreet as well as proper to go to the colonel's office first. After all, he had established something like a friendship with Ruth without having seen her father after that first night. But the office in the Hollis Building was locked and a neighbor told him that the colonel had gone down to Adamsville to look up some early records on the location of the county line, which were of some importance to the famous history. He tried to call Ruth up, for it wouldn't be much fun to climb the hill on this hot afternoon only to find her out; but the telephone was out of order. So at last he set out, his book under his arm, on the road he had traveled only last Friday. Five days. A good deal had happened in those five days; he had had several pieces of undeserved and amazing good fortune. And if they didn't bring him the proper amount of satisfaction it was because he was worried about the Hollises. Somehow he couldn't fit the old colonel into New York, at his time of life. It could be done if he had money; almost anything could be done if you had money. Ruth would fit into New York, as she would fit anywhere—without the colonel. But the old man would be an almost impossible handicap. Ruth could make a start but the colonel was through—through before he had ever got started. Back here on the hill, in the atmosphere of these old houses and old trees, Rexford found that pathetic. The colonel might be ridiculous; he might be wearing out Ruth's life without knowing it; but it was sad to think of his distinguished gifts and distinguished presence being wasted, sad to think of him as the last helpless bearer of an honored name. Sadder still to think that the only thing that could have saved him was work. And it was too late for the colonel to work now.

Automatically, Rexford pulled at the front-door bell before he remembered that it was broken. Then he rapped, long and hard. From behind the drawn shades Ruth's voice called:

"Come in."

Blinking in the half light, he followed her voice from the entrance hall to the parlor, a huge dim room dominated by two great Christmas-tree chandeliers of cut-glass pendants. From in front of the fireplace and its marble mantelpiece Ruth, on hands and knees, looked up at him—clad in her old blue sweater and a dingy skirt, a cloth around her hair, with a bucket of water beside her and a scrubbing brush in her hand.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I always seem to be interrupting you."

She flushed, but smiled gallantly.

"I thought you were the man coming to fix the telephone. He knows where it is, so he'd have gone right on into the library and left me to my labors."

"I came on an errand for my boss," Rexford explained, "which will take about two minutes. And I'm free for the rest of the afternoon. So if you have another scrubbing brush I'd like to help you."

"I don't need help."

"I didn't mean to—to break in on you like this," he said rather tensely, "but I do want to help you."

"I know," she said, rising, with a smile that made him wonder how he had ever thought her face was sullen. "But I was just scrubbing the mantelpiece and I'm almost through. After all, we knew the worst about each other from the start, didn't we?" She bit her lip; that wasn't what she had meant to say. Why was she talking of a start as if she were thinking of a finish? "What's the errand?"

"I want to look at a book—compare it with one Sellers bought."

"Well, that isn't much of an afternoon's work, is it?"

"You won't send me away, will you?"

"Why," said Ruth, "if you'll wait till I clean up and put on something respectable you may call on me—if you want to."

"I can beat that," said Rexford. "I've been put up for the Country Club by Norman Kane. Meanwhile, Sellers has given me a guest card. So I can invite you out for a swim—if——"

"No ifs," said Ruth. "We'll look at that book—then I'll be ready in fifteen minutes."

## CHAPTER XIX.

From his window on the second floor of the bank building Herb Pence saw them taking the trolley. Ruth had the black cloth bag which, he knew, carried her bathing suit; and as they waited she danced

lightly from one foot to another as if she were really enjoying herself. He hadn't seen her behave like that for a year. It was too much. He couldn't believe she really enjoyed Rexford's company; she must be flaunting her intimacy with him before the eyes of Hollisburg only to make Herb ridiculous. Well, he'd see about that. There were some things they couldn't get away with—not yet.

It was nearly three o'clock. Almost time for the bank to close. The vice-president, at least, wouldn't be needed any more today. Herb locked his desk and strode out to the shady side street where his blue roadster waited at the curb. It was time to find out who was who in Hollisburg. He drove out along the river road, passing the trolley that carried Ruth and Rexford, a mile this side of the Country Club. When they got off and came up the cinder walk to the clubhouse Herb was waiting grimly on the porch.

They saw him from afar and there was no mistaking the surly determination of his manner. Rexford, secure behind his Phi Chi pin, with his guest card in his pocket and his application for membership posted on the bulletin board, only grinned; but Ruth, who knew Hollisburg, frowned a little and stood up very straight as she strode on at Rexford's side.

"Well!" Herb greeted them. "I want to see you."

"Which of us?" asked Rexford.

Through the windows of the club lounge he could see three or four faces, and the colored kitchen help were peering out of the pantry. Whatever Herb was going to do would be done in public.

"I've got nothing to say to you," said Herb grimly. "You've got no business here. Ruth is the one I want to talk to."

"But I don't happen to want to talk to you," she said serenely, and started past him. He reached out and caught her arm.

Rexford confronted him, stared into his eyes—but didn't know what else to do. He could hardly shake Herb's hand loose and precipitate a fight over Ruth here in public. Luckily, Herb saved him the trouble of a decision.

"Get out," he snarled. "Get off the grounds before I have you thrown out. We don't want your kind of riffraff here."

"He's the guest of a club member," Ruth objected.

"Who? You?"

"Sellers, as it happens; but I'd give him a guest card if Sellers hadn't."

"Well, I don't care how many guest cards you've got. It's about time some of these people found out what's what. I tell you to get out. I want to talk to Ruth."

"You may talk to me," she said, "and listen to me, if you'll let go my arm. When you're through talking I want to say a few things."

His hand fell and Rexford hesitantly fell back.

"Now," said Herb, "I want to know what you mean."

"I mean what I said Saturday night. I'm through."

"What do you mean running around with this fellow?"

"I don't see that that concerns you."

"Oh, it don't, eh? Do you know who he is?"

"I know as much as you do."

"Which is nothing. Except that he's a hobo, a bum. Oh, well, birds of a feather, I guess. You and your father have been living on hand-outs——"

Ruth struck him on the mouth with her open hand; he caught her arm and twisted it till she doubled up with pain; and then Rexford had torn him loose.

"Come on down on the grass," he said softly. "See what you can do with somebody a little nearer your size."

They were none too near the same size, at that; Herb was three inches taller and at least thirty pounds heavier. The added height and reach gave him confidence; the difference in weight gave Rexford confidence, for he thought that most of that thirty pounds was fat. But before they had done more than exchange a few easily parried blows each realized that he had underestimated the other.

Both were strong; both were skilled boxers. Herb's fat hardly more than neutralized his extra reach; and after a moment each found that the other packed a punch. A hook to the jaw that staggered Rexford, a straight left to the body that all but sent Herb down—and they were circling each other cautiously, their eyes glowing, with a single-minded interest in this fight which had been due ever since last Friday and could now be fought out at last. They didn't notice the growing group of spectators on the porch, who whispered that it

ought to be stopped and grunted with satisfaction when one or the other of the fighters landed a hard blow; they didn't even notice Ruth, who stood a little apart from the crowd, watching with silent fascination.

It was terrible and vulgar, she knew—two men fighting over her; fighting in public, under the eyes of a score of witnesses who would tell the story, with embellishments, all over town. She ought to be shocked and ashamed; she ought to walk away coldly and never speak to either of them again. But she wasn't shocked or ashamed and she wasn't going to walk away. She was going to stay there and watch the fight and she hoped that Rexford would batter Herb to a jelly.

A quick interchange of blows, a clinch in which Herb pounded his adversary's ribs, a breakaway followed by a terrific swing which would have laid Herb out if he hadn't dodged it—and then Tom Blakely, who went to all the big fights in Cincinnati, was down between them, pushing them apart.

"That's right," said Cal Truman from the porch. "Damn shame; stop 'em."

Ruth agreed that it was a shame, but her heart echoed, "Don't stop them." And Blakely wasn't going to stop them; he had his watch out, and was telling them to break clean the next time.

The second round was Rexford's. He caught Herb, after a minute or two, with a long right to the jaw that sent him down while Blakely counted eight over him. But he was up again, falling into another clinch almost instantly and hammering Rexford's ribs hard before they broke. A moment, and Blakely called time; they dropped, panting, while the onlookers repeated that it was a shame and somebody ought to stop them.

Rexford was overconfident this time; Herb caught him with a right to the body and a left to the jaw that sent him down on one knee. Ruth's glowing eyes caught his, and he was up again in an instant, driving Herb back and back. One wallop after another was buried in the shock-absorbing fat of Herb's stomach; but Herb protected the glass jaw and Rexford couldn't break through. Yet Herb obviously was tiring; his fat was too much of a load for this very active fighting; presently he would tire, drop his guard——

Then a big, dripping man in a bathing suit ran around the corner of the porch, took in the situation, heard the continuing assertions that it was a shame and ought to be stopped—and proceeded to stop it. He ran down on the grass, shoved Blakely aside, seized one of the fighters in each hand and pushed them ten feet apart. It was Rigdon, the Baptist preacher, a militant gentleman who led raids on blind tigers and was big enough and fierce enough to lick Herb and Rexford both.

"Outrageous!" he exploded. "Tom Blakely, aren't you ashamed of yourself? I'll prefer charges to the house committee. Is this club going to be a decent place or a dive? Answer me. Is it or isn't it?"

"That's right, that's right," said three or four of the onlookers from the porch. "We're with you, Mr. Rigdon."

"Yes," said Rigdon, "you're with me after I've done what needed doing. I know your kind. But you——" He turned on Herb, panting and disheveled, on Rexford, with bruised knuckles and a swollen jaw.

"Mr. Pence, you ought to be suspended. I'm going to move for it myself, and if the club doesn't act, we'll see what kind of place this is." His boldness astounded Rexford, but the Pences were Presbyterians. "And you—I don't know you; you're not a member. If this is the way you behave where you're a guest—and in the presence of a lady——"

Ruth stepped down from the porch to Rexford's side.

"I'm not a lady, Mr. Rigdon. I thought I was but I'm not. I started this fight and I wanted to see the right side win. You didn't care about that, did you? Anybody who fights is wrong, except when you're fighting bootleggers." She turned to Rexford, who was smiling with hardly suppressed anger. "Come on—let's get out of this."

Behind them, as they walked away, rose a hubbub of voices arguing, explaining, apologizing; and over them all Herb's loud:

"I'll get him, I tell you. I'd have trimmed him in another round."

"My party isn't much of a success, is it?" said Rexford. "I can't tell you how sorry I am."

"The only thing that makes me sorry," said Ruth, "is that you didn't knock his head off. Oh, I'm not a bit nice—not a bit. I wanted you to kill him."

"Lucky I didn't. But too bad I had to start. They'll talk, I suppose; this preacher

will spread his version; it—it will be rather unpleasant for you, won't it?"

"If nothing more unpleasant than that ever happened to me," said Ruth as they came out on the road and paused at the trolley stop, "I'd be in luck. I think you were a peach to come and help me and I'll be everlastingly thankful for every blow you hit him. There—does that console you for the spoiling of our party?"

"I wish we didn't have to go home," said Rexford as the interurban car swung round the curve. "But I don't suppose there's any place else to go. You don't feel like walking, do you?"

"Not now," said Ruth, signaling to the motorman. "But if you want to kill the rest of the afternoon—you asked me once if I'd take you up to see the view from the old Miller place."

"I'll ask you again, if necessary."

"We can get off just outside of town and climb the hill. It's worth it."

As they climbed on the car Rexford wished he dared to tell her that anything that prolonged the time he could spend with her was worth it.

## CHAPTER XX.

"There!" said Ruth.

They stood on the edge of the bluff, leaning against a tumble-down rail fence encircling the pasture. To the left was the steep path up which they had climbed from the valley; before them the hill fell away abruptly to the road, the trolley track, and the river four hundred feet below. The valley spread out beyond, in broad reaches of corn land, to the woods on the gentler slope of the farther ridge. Up and down, for miles, they could see the river winding between its green-bushed banks; upstream in the distance the white wall of the dam, with the Country Club just visible through the trees beyond; below on the right the red roofs of Pence's Addition, the brick business blocks of the town and the dark green wall of the forest on the Elm Street hill rising above them.

Far in the west leaden cloud masses were piling up; there were distant murmurs, hardly sounds as yet, of thunder; rays from the hidden sun struck down to the shadowed earth. The half shadow, midway between daylight and twilight, subdued the garish buffness of the scattered blocks of stubble field, drew out the deep green-gray shadows of the corn and the woodland. The least spectacular of landscapes, but Rexford found it curiously satisfying; even to him, a stranger. And he had the feeling that if you lived here the satisfaction would endure.

"You'll miss it," he said.

"I suppose so. But don't you miss New York?"

"Any place can be missed, if you like it," he conceded with a laugh, turning to glance about the farm that lay on the rolling hilltop behind them. It looked neglected; except for a crop of alfalfa in a field beyond the pasture and some inadequate corn off beside the distant road, it was hardly cultivated at all. The house lay back, in a slight depression; a well-built house of limestone, unusual on a farm in that country, with a big but shabby barn beyond it. Beyond the wire fence that marked the inner boundary of the pasture a few forlorn haystacks thrust up their gray heads.

"I wonder if the man who lives here spends his time looking at the view. If he doesn't he's a swine who doesn't deserve the pearls."

"I don't imagine he wastes much time on it," Ruth laughed. "I don't know him, but I've seen him; he doesn't look like an enthusiast for scenery. His name's Raney."

"Raney? Oh, yes. I remember. Well, he doesn't spend much of his time taking care of the place—that's plain. I'm only an amateur farmer but even I can see that that corn's a disgrace. And there's no excuse for it—it grows a foot higher over there on the other side of the turnpike. Look at that apple orchard, too. I'll bet this is a great country for apples, but that looks like—like the tail end of bad luck."

"You're getting to be a real Hoosier, aren't you? You use our language and seem to know all about our crops."

"I don't know much," he admitted, "but I try to learn. Which can't be said of all farmers. If I owned this place I'd be able to do something with it—and still have time to look at the view."

Ruth took off her hat and sat down on the grass.

"I need a rest, after the climb," she said. "And the storm is still a long way off."

He sank down beside her, wondering if he could tell her that the party was a great suc-

cess even if they had been chased away from the Country Club.

"I wish you could see the house," said Ruth. "It's really a dear. Not modern, of course; but well built. And it has—or used to have—some really good furniture."

"Mr. Raney has some taste, then?"

"Oh, Raney's only a tenant. The farm belongs to Mr. Pence. The old Miller place—they came from New England and brought their furniture with them. They used to be one of the big families around here. But they died out; and those that were left went away; and finally there was nobody left but somebody's nephew off in Philadelphia who wouldn't even pay off the mortgage. So Mr. Pence had to take it. I don't imagine it brings him in much money, the way Raney runs it."

"Then," Rexford mused, "maybe Pence would sell it."

Ruth laughed.

"He might. Are you thinking of buying?"

Rexford looked at her, thoughtfully at first; then, as he kept on looking, found it was hard to think at all. She was looking out over the valley, rather pensively, with the wind stirring in her bobbed hair.

"I'd like to buy it," he said suddenly, "if—Ruth!"

She turned and looked at him and he realized that there was a good deal he wouldn't need to say.

"Ruth, I——" It wasn't so easy to say, after all. "I suppose you wonder what I'd buy it with. But my grandfather left me twenty-five thousand dollars, if I'd support myself by manual labor for a year. In about a month I'll collect that. And I'd like to buy this farm, and work it and live on it—if you'd live with me."

"Why did you tell me that?" she asked harshly. "No, no—I mean about the money. Because if I could have gone on thinking that you were as broke as I am I could have thought how nice it would be to do that—if we could. But——"

"Well, we can."

"We're worse than broke, father and I. Mortgages. Fifteen or twenty thousand, I suppose. They're going to begin coming due in the fall and Mr. Pence holds them. He'll foreclose."

"Fifteen or twenty from twenty-five leaves——"

"Do you think I'd let you start by paying my father's debts?"

"I'd think less of you if you wouldn't let me—us—start at all on account of your father's debts."

"I couldn't do that. Besides, it will hurt father terribly to have to move out of the old place. I couldn't leave him. He'll be cut up badly enough anyway."

"Why leave him?" Rexford demanded. "If you're going to have to give up the house anyway—and you needn't, of course—I can fix that—but if you do, we could all live up here."

"He wouldn't, on your money."

"But—but"—Rexford decided that there was no use dodging the facts—"but if you'd married Herb he'd have had to."

"That would have been different."

"How?"

"Well, it would have been—Herb would have had so much more—oh—what's your name?—Bill?—oh, Bill, I suppose I'm perfectly horrid. I'd never thought this out, you see. I suppose I thought it would be all right to live on Herb's money, because he didn't need it. But you'll need all of yours. And I won't let you start with a couple of millstones around your neck."

"But I want to."

"You wouldn't want to after you'd been at it a year or two. Oh, I didn't mean that. I'm mean. But father and I are a—a millstone, just the same. Our troubles are right ahead of us and we've got to go through them. And you can't do anything about it. The money isn't all, you know; it's being shown up as a failure before everybody that fath—that we mind. And it's too bad you happened to meet us and—and get interested in me, because you'll just have to go away and let us take what's coming."

"But you said you might go to New York; and——"

"That's all off," said Ruth abruptly. "It can't be done."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. But I won't let you get all tangled up in our troubles. You've had enough of your own."

"All the troubles I'd ever had would be nothing to the trouble you'll wish on me if you won't let us try it."

"If it were only myself," said Ruth, "I might—why, I might even let you pay my debts if I had any. But this is going to be a terrible time for father. I can't leave him. Everybody else will be against him and——"

"Then you might as well let me line up alongside, too."

Ruth rose.

"We'll be caught in the rain if we don't hurry. You see, you don't know father. He's stubborn and he'll make it as hard for himself as he can; because he's proud. And I can't quit."

They crossed the pasture and he held apart two strands of the barbed-wire fence while she slipped through. Among the haystacks they walked glum and silent, till he said:

"But I can't quit either. How do you suppose I'll feel when you're going through all this if I can't help you?"

"I know," she admitted. "That's one of the worst parts of it. And it's all bad."

"Ruth! Do you care for me—at all?"

Her dark-blue eyes were moist.

"Of course I do. But—Bill, do you know that you're the first person I've ever met that really made me happy? That I like to be with? I've always kept to myself—I've had to. People will tell you that I'm bad-tempered and proud and unsociable and glum; and I suppose probably I'm all that and more. But I was always afraid to let myself go. I couldn't. I was tied up with something that was bound to collapse some day. I couldn't talk about it to other girls; I couldn't let any man in for it. Oh, Herb! That was a fit of insanity. I ought to have known better. I've had to stick to myself.

"And now, within a week, I've found that it makes me happy just to be with you—to walk with you, and swim with you, talk to you, listen to you—or just sit and look at you. You've done me so much good. It's just because of that that I won't let you work yourself to death to support us Hollises. We bury our own dead."

He held out his arms to her but she threw up her hands and backed away.

"No, no—please don't. Because it would be so much harder."

"What if we do have to work—yes, work ourselves to death?" he demanded. "We'd have to do that anyway to get anywhere; we might as well get somewhere we want to go instead of just running around in circles. We're used to work. And if we were working for what we want—our very own particular job——"

"I'd never supposed," she confessed shyly, "that it would be my very own particular job to be a farmer's wife. But I don't suppose you'd meant to be a farmer till you saw this place."

"I'd thought of it but it took the sight of this to bring me to boiling point. Oh, Ruth, are you really thinking of it?"

"No," she said gravely. "I'm only telling myself a beautiful fairy story. I'd love it, if we could."

"Of course we could," he declared. "We could make a living—a good living—out of this very farm. This fellow Raney can't, perhaps; but he's no farmer and he doesn't work. Why—he doesn't even know how to put a haystack together. Look at this."

He walked over to the nearest one—awkwardly put up, unstable—and contemptuously thrust his hand into a crevice in the thatched wall.

"Why, if I gave a shove," he said laughingly, "this thing would tumble down. If I should——"

He stopped, thrust his arm in farther.

"Anybody in sight?" he asked in a changed tone.

"Nobody. Why?"

A heave, a twist, and a layer of hay slid off to the ground. Where it had been stood out a black curved thing—the body of an automobile.

"No wonder Raney isn't much of a farmer," said Rexford grimly. "He doesn't have to be."

Ruth hardly understood, even yet.

"What a queer place to hide his car!" she exclaimed.

"Not queer at all," he said thoughtfully. "Not at all. You see, his car—or rather the car he had in town last night—is a Dodge. This is a Buick."

"Oh!" said Ruth. "We've found something, haven't we?"

"It looks as if." And then a rumble of thunder, nearer now, drowned his voice. In their late preoccupation they hadn't noticed that the clouds had spread across the sky; it was almost dusk. Ruth looked at her cheap wrist watch.

"Why, it's nearly half past seven! And we'll have to hurry to miss the storm."

They set off rapidly down the hill, more gently sloping here, but still steep enough. In the gathering darkness she stumbled; he reached out, caught her hand, jerked her up—and into his arms. He kissed her as hard and as suddenly as Herb had kissed her Saturday night; but she didn't mind

it. She clung to him and kissed him back till another peal of thunder banged above them.

"Come," she cried, releasing herself but clinging still to his hand. "We can argue after we get home. No use getting rained on. And I'm starved, aren't you? Come up to the house and we'll have a cold supper."

"We ought to——"

"Tell Mr. Flint about what we've found?" Rexford grinned.

"Mr. Flint and I aren't on speaking terms. No, I've found that the best thing to do with trouble is to tell it to Sellers."

## CHAPTER XXI.

Black sodden clouds hung low in the windless, sultry evening; the lightning played around the horizon, and the steady murmur of distant thunder was punctuated at intervals by louder, nearer claps; but the rain held off. Rexford and Ruth came swinging into town, keeping step in a long rapid pace—their hearts thumping from their race with the storm, the discovery of the mystery of Raney's farm, their own new and marvelous emotion. Anybody who saw them coming down Main Street, as many people did, must have felt their tingling exaltation; it was exciting and delightful merely to look at them.

They peered into Dan Cullen's lunch counter, but Sellers wasn't there. Then down the side street; but the office was dark and when Rexford knocked loudly there was no answer.

"Probably gone to the movies," he suggested, "and I haven't a key."

"Then you'd better come up to the house and have supper. You can call him from there. Oh, I forgot—the telephone's out of order. But—do you have to find Sellers now?"

He smiled softly at her in the shadow.

"Sellers can wait." Then, his glance roving, he saw Rufe across the street, closing the gate into the yard behind the garage. "Anyway," Rexford added, "I can leave a message for him."

He crossed the street and addressed the suspicious Rufe.

"If Mr. Sellers comes back, will you tell him I want to see him? I'm going—er—out, but I'll be back before very long."

That, he reflected, was probably untrue, on his first chance to spend an evening with Ruth; but Sellers would be up and waiting for him, anyway. And, as Rufe nodded, Rexford hurried back to join his girl—his girl!

Hurrying up the hill, breathless, they thought they had beaten the storm. But as they crossed the street to the Hollises' gate the first big drops came down. Through the circle of light beneath the street-corner arc lamp, into the dimness of the long flight of steps between the shadowing sycamores—and the rain came down in a torrent. They ran up the steps, stumbling, laughing, always faster.

Halfway up was a sort of landing—a platform paved with flagstones, twenty feet square, ornamented with a broken bench, and a lamp which in the great days of the Hollises had held a gaslight. The light had gone out long ago but the landing still offered a moment's interruption in that long steady climb. As Ruth reached it she almost fell.

"Oh—Bill! Not so fast."

Rexford picked her up and started on up the steps. They were endless and Ruth wasn't as light as she looked; but he didn't care. She was clinging to him, her arms around his neck; and her lips were pressed against his till they neared the top and came within the light from the parlor window. Then he set her down hastily, and they ran up, dripping, on the porch, to bring the old colonel to the door, coatless and slippered.

"God bless me, Ruth, you're wet through. I wondered where you were. Good evening, Mr. Rexford. Delighted to welcome you beneath my roof again."

"We were out at the club," said Ruth. "And we haven't had anything to eat. Have you?"

"I had something downtown," said the colonel. "My, my! Ruth, go up and put on some dry clothes. Mr. Rexford, if you'll come with me I can at least give you a pair of dry slippers and a dressing gown."

Rufe had gone back to the garage office. There, as the rain descended, he pulled down the window shade and sat gloomily by the desk. Rexford again! Why should he have to send word to Sellers that he wanted to see him? Queer way for a chauffeur-office boy to talk to his boss. Rufe wondered what Blades would think of this.

But Blades wasn't there. Blades, of course, was dining with the Pences. The

invitations would be out next week. Honeymoon in Canada. Settle down and go straight; become business men of Hollisburg. That was Blades' way.

"No," said Rufe grimly. "He can fix it his way but maybe I can fix things my way, too. I know how to take care of myself. And there was one thing we both agreed ought to be done before he got off on this new slant."

Lifting a corner of the shade he peered out into Main Street. The stores opposite could hardly be seen through the sheets of falling rain. Nobody would be out to-night. A man could go where he pleased. In the shadows—shadows of tall sycamores, in a yard on the hillside far above the street lamps, far below the lights of the house——

Rufe went to a locker in the corner of the room, opened it and took out a raincoat. He threw it loosely over his shoulders as he stooped down; even a man who might come in suddenly couldn't see into the locker as Rufe reached in cautiously, pressed here and there. The false back wall swung open, disclosing a compartment that even Blades had never seen. Rufe took out, with extreme care, a pair of rubber gloves which he thrust into a pocket; then a two-foot length of gas pipe which he slipped down a trousers leg. Then he pushed the false wall back into place, closed the locker and slipped out. Dodging behind the cars in the garage he escaped the notice of the sleepy negroes. Back to the alley fence, to remove a loose board, and replace it carefully after he had slipped through. Then, muffled in his raincoat, a dark cap well down over his eyes, he set out toward the Elm Street hill.

Coming back from the club a couple of hours earlier Herb Pence had gone to his private room in the deserted bank. His body ached from the blows he had taken in the fight; his face smarted. A temper naturally bad, made worse by this fierce inconclusive battle, hadn't been improved at all by an argument with the Reverend Mr. Rigdon on the morality and etiquette of promiscuous fighting. Herb had come back to town in black ferocity. He wouldn't go home; he didn't want to see his father or George Blades; still less any of the young men about town who would presently hear of his fight at the club. There was only one consolation for him; and when he had locked his door behind him and pulled down the shades he found it in a drawer of his desk—a bottle of real prewar bourbon.

He drank steadily, quick gulps unworthy of this noble drink that ought to have been sipped drop by drop; big gulps chased down by occasional tumblers from the water cooler. And as he drank his black bitterness grew. Ruth and Rexford and Rigdon—he'd get even with all three. Ruth first—Ruth first? Why not Rexford first? He had a suspicion, which gradually became a conviction, that damage done to Rexford would be the worst possible blow at Ruth. One idea after another passed through his muddling head till at last an unusually heavy clap of thunder shook him into half sobriety. He looked at the bottle. Almost all gone. Didn't know he could hold that much and still keep his head. Better man than he'd thought. Better man than she'd thought. Better man than anybody'd thought.

He reached into his pocket for a cigarette. None there. Well, he could get some at Meservy's pool room. Unsteadily he made his way up the street to face Meservy across the counter.

"Hear you're goin' to challenge Dempsey," said Meservy jovially. "Where's your sparrin' partner?"

"You go to hell," Herb responded with dignity and lurched out on to the sidewalk. And there he saw Ruth and Rexford walking down the opposite side of the street, swinging along lightly, their faces glowing, their hearts apparently as light as their feet. He glowered at them as they turned off down the side street, wondering, thinking fearful things. He was going home with her—Herb had gone home with her till Saturday night. Home, to sit and talk with that old ass the colonel, to wriggle under Ruth's saturnine glances and infrequent sardonic remarks, to argue with her for the privilege of a cold caress before he went home. She didn't look cold to-night.

Herb decided he'd go up to the house, confront them, have—have a show-down, he decided vaguely. He could have licked Rexford this afternoon if the preacher hadn't stopped them. Could he, now? It had been a tougher fight than he expected. The man probably was a city thug, maybe a gunman. Gunman—best to take no chances.

Herb went back to the bank and finished

the bottle; then, with lights off, but finding his way through this familiar room by the glow of the street lamps streaming through the windows, and the dim bulb always lit in front of the vault, he edged toward the cashier's window. What he wanted was on a little shelf just below the counter; and it always was loaded. Jim Harby had never been held up but he would never be caught napping. Herb slipped the gun into his hip pocket, turned up his coat collar and strode out into the rain.

In the tall bay-windowed dining room of the Hollis mansion Ruth and Rexford were eating supper—cold ham, cold biscuit, chicken salad, three or four kinds of jellies, chocolate layer cake and hot coffee. The colonel had sat with them for a little while and then withdrawn to the library. He was settling down more energetically on the history; mustn't let himself be diverted by extraneous misfortunes. So the two were left alone. Rexford was wrapped in a purple silk dressing gown of the colonel's, with holes worn clear through it in places and the tasseled silk cord that had once belted it replaced by a length of clothesline; he wore a pair of the colonel's slippers that were three sizes too big. But he didn't care. For he sat at the head of the table, and Ruth sat opposite, in a trim little white waist and skirt, pouring his coffee.

"If you married me——" he began presently.

"Now, Bill!"

"Well, if you did," he persisted, "it would probably be a good thing that we didn't have much money. Because if we were rich we'd have to keep up appearances by hiring the late czar's cook and he wouldn't be anywhere near so good as you."

"I wouldn't——" she began, then stopped. "Did you hear that?"

"I hear a good deal," said Rexford. "Rain and thunder, mostly. What did you hear?"

"It sounded like a knock at the door," she said, puzzled. "Whoever, on a night like this—there! It is a knock at the door!"

She rose hurriedly but the colonel called back from the front hall: "Never mind, Ruth. I'll go."

The two in the dining room could hear only indistinct voices and it was just as well that they did. For the colonel opened the door on Herb Pence, water dripping in sheets from his coat and his shapeless Panama, his face flushed and his eyes glassy.

"I want to see Ruth," he muttered.

"Why, Herb!" The colonel was convinced that something awful had happened —perhaps to Leila, perhaps to St. Elmo Pence. And the telephone was still out of order. Then he caught a faint odor. He was wrong. Something awful had happened to Herb. Awful? Well—the colonel regretted that the gifts of Providence should be so misused; Herb undeniably was drunk. Still, a connoisseur of aromas couldn't help respecting the stuff that had made him drunk. And the colonel, in the first flush of eagerness to rescue a voyager through the storm, had brought him in.

"Why do you want to see Ruth?" he demanded sternly.

"I—I got my reasons. Got to see her." Swaying back and forth, Herb's hand wandered back toward his hip pocket, then away. So, thought the colonel, he has his flask on him.

"You're not fit to speak to a lady in your present condition," he said sternly. "I won't turn you back into the storm; but come into the library."

"Is he here?"

"Who?"

"This fellow that calls himself Rexford."

"It doesn't concern you who is my guest in my house."

"Well, if you want to know about this—call Ruth. I got to see Ruth. You tell her, now. After what happened this afternoon I got to see her. You tell her and she'll come runnin' if she knows I'm here. Tell her I've got something to say to her."

The colonel looked him up and down with contempt. Bounder! But these were strange times and Herb had referred to something that had happened this afternoon, something unknown to the colonel.

"Wait here," he said sharply. He strode down to the dining room.

"Ruth, Herb Pence is here. He—he's rather in his cups, I fear. He says he wants to see you and he seems so sure you want to see him that I thought perhaps there——"

"Isn't that like Herb?" said Ruth contemptuously. "I've been telling him ever since Saturday night I don't want to see him; but he can't get it through his head. Well, I'll make him understand this time."

She rose but the colonel waved her back.

"Never mind, daughter. I'll attend to this."

There was a firmness, an authority in his manner that Ruth hadn't seen for years, so she sank down uncertainly in her chair as he closed the door behind him.

"Herb must be pickled, to come out in this weather. I hope he doesn't say anything mean to father."

The colonel came back to confront the swaying youth in the front hall.

"She won't see you; and quite properly —I say she won't see you. Good night, Mr. Pence."

Herb's hand slipped back to his hip pocket.

The colonel's face grew red.

"I've got something here," said Herb, fumbling at his pocket, "that maybe will make her talk."

"Get out!" the colonel roared. "Do you think my daughter is one of your drunken modern hussies? Great God, as if prohibition wasn't outrageous enough, without having what good liquor is left wasted on whelps like you. Take your hand away from that pocket!"

Herb hesitated, stepped back, and took his hand away.

"Get out!" said the colonel. "Go home and sleep it off. And never dare let me see your impudent face here again. Something that will make her talk! Great God! Bounder! Whippersnapper! Get out!"

His gray hair standing out around his pink face he towered over Herb furiously; and after a last struggle between a dying and defeated determination, and the whisky-dulled nerves that wouldn't respond, Herb collapsed with a groaning sigh and stumbled out through the door that the colonel had flung open. The colonel stood watching in the open doorway till Herb was halfway down to the landing; then, satisfied that he was really going home, he shut the door.

It was cold and wet waiting, for the man who lurked in the shadow of a sycamore beside the broken bench on the landing, rain pouring down the back of his neck and running water sloshing in his shoes. But Rufe had waited longer and on worse nights for things he wanted. The rubber gloves, skin tight, were on his hands; the gas pipe was grasped firmly under the cloaking raincoat. And he hadn't been there more than five minutes when the door far above him opened and a man came out. This was unexpected luck. Rufe had expected to wait an hour or two, but clearly Rexford had only taken the girl home and was now coming away. Colonel Hollis' figure was dimly outlined in the lighted doorway, evidently watching in hospitable farewell as his guest left; and Rufe began to be seriously alarmed. But the door closed, the light vanished, and only an infrequent flash of lightning showed the watcher the figure of the young man stumbling down the steps.

This was going to be easy. Rufe drew out his gas pipe refastened his raincoat and shrank back behind the sycamore. Nearer and nearer, plumping down recklessly three steps at a time; his victim came out on the forgotten landing, stumbled, caught himself and looked about uncertainly just as Rufe stepped out and swung his gas pipe.

As his arm went up another flash of lightning rippled across the sky and Rufe looked into the bewildered fat face of Herb Pence. It was too late to withdraw but instinctively he did what his subconsciousness had to do, even though his thought, a second later, realized that it was a mistake. He pulled his punch; the blow fell with half the force it had started with, and Herb, sensing trouble, had just had time to fling up a warding arm. Nevertheless, he fell headlong as the gas pipe struck him; fell and lay motionless. And Rufe, pausing a moment to make sure he was senseless, threw the gas pipe as far as he could on the terraced yard and slipped away through the rain, cursing silently.

## CHAPTER XXII.

After seeing Herb off the colonel had come back to the dining room where Ruth and Rexford had tried vainly to catch the words spoken by those two angry voices beyond the closed doors.

"He's gone," he announced. "I had to speak rather plainly to him, I'm afraid. Bah! What can you expect? St. Elmo Pence is a man of no breeding; Mrs. Pence was a very estimable and worthy woman, but—no figs from thistles; no figs from thistles." He broke off, feeling that these municipal quarrels shouldn't be ventilated before a stranger to the town; but Ruth spoke up:

"Well, Herb's a thistle. A prickly one. I hate him." Within a day or so, she knew,

her father would hear of what had happened at the club; so she'd better get her story in first. "We had a fight out at the club this afternoon."

The colonel lit a stogy before he answered:

"What language you young people use! Anybody would suppose——"

"It was a real fight," said Ruth. "I hit him and he tried to break my arm and Bill—Mr. Rexford—called him aside and was beating him to pieces——"

"Bless my soul!" The colonel's exclamation, and the colonel's face, told little of the emotions that were running through him. His girl had struck a man; she had engaged in a low brawl; and the young man who—very properly—had gone to her help was already known to her as Bill. The colonel thought that "Bless my soul!" was the least that could be said.

"So you beat him to pieces?" he inquired genially.

"Not quite," Rexford conceded. "To tell the truth, sir, it was about even. I think I'd have beaten him, and probably he thinks he'd haye beaten me; but we were separated."

"Mr. Rigdon," Ruth explained. "He came in and pushed them apart just when Bill was getting the better of him."

"That sounds like Rigdon," the colonel observed. "He's one of these angels who rush in where ordinary sensible fools would know enough not to tread. But how did you come to—ah—strike Herb?"

"Oh, he was saying things," Ruth explained obscurely. "I'll never speak to him again—honestly. I hate him."

"Bless my soul!" said the colonel again, retiring behind the smoke of his stogy. His daughter was showing a fierceness that he had never dreamed was in her; she was almost—Heaven help him—almost vulgarly emotional. His eyes roved again, rather anxiously, to the young man she persisted in calling Bill. Bill's manners were good, but the colonel wished they knew more about him.

"Well, well!" said the colonel with a great clearing of the throat. "I suppose the world goes round. A great many things seem to be settled by fighting nowadays that used to be argued out, or ignored. I hope you won't find it necessary to strike him again."

"I'll keep away from him," Ruth promised. "That's the surest way to keep from hitting him. And you will, too, Bill—won't you?"

The colonel loosened his collar. She was addressing this Bill in a tone of quiet, intimate command, giving him orders as if she were certain that they would be obeyed.

"Our fight is adjourned *sine die*," Rexford promised. "Of course if he jumps on me I'll have to defend myself—but I'll keep out of his way if I can."

The rain had almost stopped; there was a steady drip from the eaves, a metallic tinkle of water pouring through tin gutters, but the downpour had given way to a fitful retreating drizzle. Rexford looked out through the tall bay windows.

"I'd better be getting back to the office," he announced. "I'm due for a little talk with my boss to-night." Ruth's eyebrows went up in a question as she nodded toward her father; Rexford, behind the colonel's back, shook his head. No use spreading the news of their find on the farm.

When he had changed the dressing gown and slippers for his damp coat and his stiff, soaked shoes both Hollises accompanied him to the door and watched him well on his way down the uneven steps over which little sheets of running water fell in tiny cascades; the colonel looked at his watch.

"Half past nine. He leaves early for a young man of this generation."

"He had some work to do," Ruth explained demurely. "Don't worry—he'll come again. I'd forgotten that you wanted to draw him out on sociology."

The colonel cast a pained and sophisticated glance at his daughter—who, he had realized very suddenly, was herself more sophisticated than he had imagined. For the first time he looked at her as at a grown woman, and she was almost a stranger. No doubt, the colonel mused as he went back to the library and settled down to his writing, they would have Rexford around the house a good deal from now on; but it didn't seem likely that there would be much opportunity to draw him out on sociology.

Ruth was removing the supper dishes; the colonel set his pen to paper, paused to recover his train of thought—and heard a tramping on the porch and a knock at the door. He got up promptly and angrily; if this was Herb again he'd throw him out.

And it was Herb again, but a limp, senseless Herb, thrown like a sack over Rexford's shoulder.

"What in the world——" the colonel gasped. "Hurt, is he? Badly hurt?"

"Afraid so," Rexford panted. "I stumbled over him—down here. On the landing."

"Bring him into the library. Ruth!"

Rexford laid his dripping, muddy burden down on a wicker couch and straightened up to face the two Hollises.

"I might have known it," the colonel was muttering. "I might have known it. He was too drunk to get down those steps in the dark and the rain. He must have stumbled."

"He didn't stumble," said Rexford, lifting Herb's head. The back of it was covered with blood.

"Somebody hit him from behind," said Rexford grimly, "and hit him hard."

The colonel straightened up.

"Well, we needn't lose time. Our telephone is out of order, Mr. Rexford. Will you go down to the Crawfords'—that house across the street, on the right—and telephone to Mr. Pence, and Doctor Peebles? I think that will be enough. Pence will make the arrangements to move him, if he can be moved. Ruth, go get a basin of warm water and some towels."

Rexford was running down the steps; Ruth had gone to the kitchen. The colonel regarded Herb with something like pity. The boy smelled loudly of liquor, but they might as well remove evidence that would upset St. Elmo Pence if it met his eye at the outset. Cautiously the colonel reached around to the hip pocket, to extract and hide the flask; and his fingers touched a cold metallic barrel, a rough hard-rubber pistol butt.

"I'm damned," he grunted.

When Rexford came back Herb had been cleaned up and looked considerably less disastrous; but the wound on his head seemed to be serious and he was still unconscious. But hardly had they begun to wonder what they could do by way of first aid when a horn sounded from the winding driveway, followed by the furious whirring of a motor. St. Elmo Pence had broken all records across town and up the hill. With him was Leila, and with Leila George Blades; and there was still another man in their party—Frank Flint, formidable in blue uniform and nickeled star, whom Pence had picked up on Main Street and brought to the scene of what evidently was a crime.

But all these fell into the background as Pence strode into the library.

"How is he, Hollis?" Then, without waiting for an answer he dropped beside the cot and peered at the bandaged wound. He had come in with such a rush that one might have supposed he was going to dress the wound himself, diagnose the case, do everything that the doctor might have done and do it better; but he didn't. He sat back helplessly on his heels, almost as if he were afraid to touch his son. He shivered.

Leila tiptoed in behind him, trembling, clinging to Blades' arm. They made as good a picture of the bereaved family at the deathbed as could have been desired; their gloom was pouring in floods over the others in the room when with a flash of headlights and a honking Doctor Peebles' car arrived. He brushed the Pences out of the way and examined the injured man intently, calling now for this and that implement of first aid that Ruth hurried to bring.

"Well?" Pence whispered.

"There's no fracture. Can't tell how serious the shock may be, of course; but nothing is smashed."

"Then he'll live?"

"Of course. He may be laid up for three days or three weeks, but he'll live."

"Ah!" St. Elmo Pence straightened up, shook himself, and recovered his imperial bearing. "Then the question is to find the man who did it." His eyes blazed at Rexford. "You found him, eh? Then tell the chief of police about it."

Telling Flint wasn't so easy, for he kept interrupting. What else, whom else, had Rexford seen on the landing? Nobody? A sneering grin. How was Herb lying? Was he conscious? What had Rexford been doing here?

"He'd been here for supper," Ruth interposed with quiet scorn. Very well; what had Herb been doing here?

"He said he came to see my daughter," said the colonel. "She didn't want to see him, so he left."

"He left, eh? And then Rexford left?"

"Now, Rexford," Flint growled, "you had a fight with Mr. Herb this afternoon, didn't you? At the club? Over this girl."

"Over his manners," Rexford amended.

"No impudence, now! And you brought her home; and he came to see her; and she wouldn't see him; and—you was separated before you had a chance to fight it out this

afternoon, wasn't you? And each of you said he'd get the other."

"This is preposterous," Colonel Hollis interrupted.

"What do you know about this fellow?" Flint demanded.

"He is my—er—friend; he has been my guest——"

"Yes, he come up to cut your grass last week, didn't he? That's the first you ever seen him. What do you know about him? Who is he? Where's he from?"

"Hadn't you better ask me that?" said Rexford. "I know more about it than Colonel Hollis."

"Shut up till I speak to you. What do you know about him, colonel?"

"I know he's a gentleman. That alone is enough to make him remarkable in this town."

"Gentleman!" St. Elmo Pence set the example of scornful laughter, in which his satellites joined. "Well, doctor, can we take the boy home? I can improvise a pretty fair couch of cushions in that car of mine."

"I think so," said the doctor. "Better get a nurse for him—I think Miss Hubbard is free this week. I don't need to tell you to be careful."

"You certainly don't. Leila, go out and tell Berry to come in and help us carry him." Then, as the colored chauffeur appeared in the doorway: "Doctor, I suppose you won't mind taking Flint downtown, will you?"

Flint looked inquiringly at the great man.

"Looks like a case to me, Mr. Pence."

"What? Oh, by all means. Arrest him, certainly. We'll hold him while we investigate, anyhow."

"What's this?" said the colonel. "Arrest this boy? What for?"

"For trying to kill Herb," said Pence viciously. "For hitting him on the back of the head, after he couldn't beat him from in front this afternoon."

"If you think I could do a man that much damage with my fist," said Rexford, bowing gracefully, "why, Mr. Pence, you flatter me."

"We'll find what you did it with," said Pence coldly. "I suppose you'll be telling me Herb hit himself, or fell on his face and cut the back of his head open."

"Preposterous!" said the colonel.

"Who else was in your yard to-night? Who else had a grudge against Herb? Who else, since Pence cleaned out the tramps, isn't known in this town? We let one tramp stay; and that was one too many."

Flint laid his hand on Rexford's shoulder.

"Come along," he ordered. "See if Clay Sellers can get you out of this."

"Now, Berry," Pence ordered, "you and George take Herb. Leila, bring his hat. Ruth, you'll be wanted down in justice's court to-morrow, probably, to give evidence about that affair at the club. And I want to understand——"

"Pence," said the colonel heavily, "we all sympathize with you; we'll do what he can to help find out who did this; but—you can't give orders in my house."

"Your house?" Pence repeated, his undershot jaw thrusting still farther out. "Why, Hollis, you haven't got enough of an equity in this house to buy a postage stamp. I give orders where I damn please."

He shepherded them all out, Flint clutching Rexford's shoulder and shoving him with needless vigor. The door slammed; the cars throbbed, hummed and rolled away; through the returning silence they heard the patter of the returning rain.

Ruth was standing silent in the corner, sullen fire blazing in her eyes. With a jerky motion she started up and went out into the hall. The colonel's head dropped. Pence had beaten him; Pence had had his way. Money, political power, the prestige of success, the confidence of mastery—he would and could give orders where he pleased.

Ruth came back in her Panama and a raincoat.

"Where are you going?" her father asked.

"Down to tell Clay Sellers about this."

"You—we—don't you think Rexford can look after that?"

"I'm not so sure, with Flint giving him a third degree, or something. Flint's been after him ever since he came to town. He'll jump at this chance."

"Daughter," said the colonel, "I—Pence is a headstrong, hard man; but—you don't suppose there could be anything——"

"You mean Bill did it? Nonsense!"

"When Herb came up here this evening he had a gun in his pocket. He was drunk and he may have meant to use it. Well, I got Herb out of the way. But if he waited for Rexford, if he set on him——"

"If that had happened," said Ruth, "Bill would have told us. And he'd never hit a man from behind. And he didn't have any-

thing to hit him with, anyway. So there. I'm going down to get Sellers started."

The colonel threw out his hand.

"You? Why, child, it's raining, and dark as pitch. No, if you feel we ought to notify Sellers to-night, I'll go. It's my place."

"It's my place," said Ruth. "I love him."

The colonel felt the room whirling about him.

"Why—why, daughter, we don't know anything about him. I don't, at any rate."

"I don't know much," Ruth admitted, "but I know that much. Do you think I could sit still here while you're down looking for Sellers and maybe Flint is giving Bill a third degree? I've stood by you and played your game, father, but this is my game. I'm going to do what I can for him."

"We'll both go," said the colonel, putting on his coat.

He gave her an arm as they went down the slippery steps in the rain, but none the less he felt very weak and helpless. He had been insulted and humiliated in his own house; he had just heard the incredible news that his daughter thought she was in love with a man of whom they knew nothing, an ex-hobo, a man she hadn't known a week. A sudden age. Headstrong young people. What was the world coming to? And he, Oliver Perry Morton Hollis, on this decisive evening was only the tail to his daughter's kite, could only sit by in dubious silence while she worked and planned in a cause that was suddenly her supreme interest. He was getting old; old and useless.

They found Clay Sellers reading in his office and he looked as astonished as the colonel had felt when the two Hollises came in, dripping, from the night. But now the colonel could take the lead, for the moment. He explained, briefly, what had happened, though he said nothing about the emotions that had brought them down here. They had felt that their guest, Mr. Rexford, was innocent; they were sure Sellers would want to protect him against what looked like persecution by the Pences.

"It certainly does," said Sellers, with an expression as nearly angry as the colonel had ever seen on his face. "Wonder if Elmo Pence thought of all that himself? Who came up with him? Ah! Blades, eh? Now I wonder—well, colonel, we'll do what we can. I'll go around and talk to Flint."

"Wait!" said Ruth. "There's something else. If I don't tell you now, I'll forget it. Bill and I walked home this afternoon. I took him up to see the view from the old Miller place; and we saw——"

Sellers listened with an inscrutable mask of calm, puffing at his corncob pipe while the colonel's eyes grew bigger and bigger. But when Ruth had finished Sellers slapped his thigh and burst into laughter.

"You certainly made a find," he chuckled. "You certainly did. Well, Ruth, I don't know whether that little discovery will help any in this other matter but it's so blamed important the other matter can wait. I'll just call up Flint and let him know I'm on the job, so that he won't get too fresh. I kind of think Flint's a little bit afraid of me, what I know about how he spends his time on his trips to Indianapolis. And then I'll ask you to say nothing about this little affair of the haystack till I've passed it on to more properly interested parties. No, Ruth, don't you worry. I'll look after Rexford just as well as you would yourself. I'll call you up to-morrow and let you know how things are going; but just now I've got to phone Flint."

Five minutes later the Hollises had gone, having stayed to hear Flint called up at the jail and shaken by some suave insinuations as to what Sellers could tell, if he felt like it. And when the Hollises had vanished into the darkness Sellers took up the phone again and called the Pershing House.

"Room 24, please. Hello, Mr. Crisler. Say, come right over. No, you don't need to be afraid to be seen with me now. We've got 'em."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

Nevertheless, they hadn't got them—not yet; and it was lucky for Clay Sellers and B. F. Crisler that Hollisburg was too much excited next morning to pay attention to their unusual activity.

That Herb Pence had been violently assaulted and that Bill Rexford was in jail charged with the crime was big news for Hollisburg. As the town talked it over on Thursday morning there wasn't much doubt about his guilt. The Pences had spread the first version of the story and as they told it there was no room for two opinions. It was notorious that Rexford and Herb had had an inconclusive fight at the club the day before; Herb had been heard threatening to get Rexford, so of course Rexford must have been equally determined to get Herb;

and Rexford had been seen in the company of a girl whose recent and unexpected quarrel with Herb was still a matter of lively gossip. The editor of the *Evening Gazette,* after keeping his ears open up and down Main Street, went back to the office to write a sizzling story in which Rexford was referred to, without qualification, as "the criminal," who was likely to be saved from mob violence only by Chief Flint's courageous insistence that the law must be allowed to take its course.

But shortly before noon Clay Sellers strolled into the *Gazette* office.

"Hear you're writin' quite a piece about this affair, Clayton," he observed. "Thought you might like to hear two sides. I'm Rexford's attorney, you know."

"It's in the story," said Clayton. "Flint tells me you were putting in your oar almost before he'd got him locked up."

"Knowin' Flint," said Sellers, "I thought I'd better be quick. But what I wanted to tell you, Clayton, was that you can quote me as sayin' that my client's innocent, and that evidence now in my possession—now in my possession, mind you—will prove that whenever he comes up in court for hearing."

"Oh, I can quote you as saying that, can I?"

"Yes, you can. And what's more, you blame well better quote me as sayin' that if you don't want a good stiff libel suit on your hands as soon as Rexford is let off. Which will be as soon as his case comes before a justice. He'll never be held for the grand jury. I just wanted to set you right, Clayton, not wishin' to see you lose your profits from the county printing in a lawsuit."

Clayton thought it over; Clay Sellers rarely talked like this unless he knew what he was talking about. So the story wasn't at all as sizzling as he had intended and Sellers' statement was given due prominence. The *Gazette* got out an extra at noon and by that time there was already evidence of a division of sentiment. Some of this may have been due to the discreet propaganda that Sellers was conducting by word of mouth; some of it, doubtless, to the fact that Rexford, too, was a Phi Chi, and that it would be more flattering to the interest of the order to have him turn out innocent. Then Tom Blakely, who had seen the fight at the club, had risked the wrath of the Pences by proclaiming that Herb had started it, and the preacher, Rigdon, gave testimony that after it had ended Herb had threatened to do worse things to Rexford than Rexford was accused of doing to Herb. Finally it was rumored that Herb had gone to the Hollis home with liquor on his breath and a gun in his pocket. Nobody knew how the rumor had started, but a surprising number of people were found to whisper, and then begin to say more openly, that that was like Herb.

Of course this wasn't evidence, except as to the rather surprising fact that there were a good many people in town who had a smoldering resentment against the Pences. St. Elmo Pence got wind of that in the course of the day and it troubled him. He had no more immediate worries about Herb; the boy was in bed in his own room, with a competent nurse, and though he wasn't fully conscious yet the doctor didn't expect serious consequences. But it was disgraceful to find that some citizens of Hollisburg should have turned against the side of law and order. It wasn't right. Sellers, yes, perhaps old Hollis, were setting people against him, after all he had done for this graceless town.

Colonel Hollis, as a matter of fact, hadn't spoken to anybody to-day except Clay Sellers; and when the telephone was finally repaired, early in the afternoon, his first use of it was to call up the bank and ask for St. Elmo Pence.

"I wanted to inquire about Herb," he announced.

"Doing very well," said Pence curtly.

"I'm glad to hear it. I want you to know, Mr. Pence, that while we think you made a grave error in placing the blame for this unfortunate affair, we sympathize sincerely with you and Herb."

"Save your sympathy for people that need it," Pence barked. "Yourself, for one. I might as well make it plain to you now, Hollis, since you talked so big about your house last night, that you don't get any more money out of me. One of those mortgages on your house is going to be due October first; one on the Hollis Building, in December. And unless you get the money to pay them, and get it from somebody else, I'll set you out."

"I am fully aware of the incidence and date of my obligations," said the colonel coldly.

"You haven't seemed to be, in the past. But you might as well understand you needn't come whining to me with any more hard-luck stories, or talk about this book of yours. Pay up the money you owe me or get out."

He hung up abruptly, conscious that he had been a little harsher than he had intended. His nerves were still shaken by what had happened to Herb. He certainly didn't intend to let Hollis have any more money, but he would perhaps have broken it more delicately if he had had time to think. However, he might as well let the old dead beat know what was coming to him.

Ordinarily, Rexford would have been taken before a justice of the peace that day. Thanks to Pence, he wasn't; all the justices made one excuse or another for not hearing the case. At first this had been due merely to Pence's preoccupation; he wanted to be present at the hearing and he had to look after Herb. But when it appeared that Herb was doing as well as could be expected Pence concluded that they might as well wait till he recovered and could tell about the attack on him. His testimony would make the case conclusive.

Sellers might have insisted on an immediate hearing for his client, but he was busy himself that day on business which couldn't wait so conveniently as the comparatively simple matter of clearing Rexford. Either Sellers or Crisler had had an eye on the garage every moment that morning, and Raney hadn't appeared. By afternoon three mysterious strangers had arrived in town—Crisler's operatives, summoned by telephone from Chicago when Sellers had routed him out the night before. One of them climbed the hill, by an unobtrusive route, to observe the doings on the farm; the others mingled, unnoticed on this exciting day, with the groups on Main Street that were discussing the attack on Herb.

Nevertheless Crisler and Sellers were far from content. The prompt arrest of Rexford had shown that the Pences controlled the police. An effort to arrest George Blades would have to be backed by powerful evidence before Pence would consent to his seizure and unless Pence consented time would be lost and Blades might get away. So Crisler, satisfied that nothing was likely to happen overnight, decided late in the afternoon to take the one step that could insure them against that misfortune—to go to Indianapolis and present his evidence to the governor. He had enough to convince an impartial man, especially an otherwise impartial man who happened to be one of Pence's political foes. And with the governor behind them they could make sure that the city and county officials would act.

So Mr. Crisler went away on the four-fifty-three train, explaining to a dutiful delegation from the chamber of commerce that he expected to return, but had to see some of the records in the State geologist's office; and Sellers went over to the county jail to see his client.

On his first hurried visit last night, snatched from the time he had had to give to planning things out with Crisler, Sellers hadn't had time to talk much with Rexford. He had asked him all about the circumstances of the finding of Herb, all about their fight at the club; but he hadn't thought of telling him that Ruth and her father had come down in the rain to set him to work on the case. And it didn't occur to him that Rexford's polite but inexplicable apathy was due to Ruth. Not that Rexford supposed she thought him guilty; but she had stood in adamantine silence while Flint and Pence were fastening the crime on him last night. After all, she didn't know much about him; she might have felt a sudden loathing of her equally sudden emotion for him, might have tried to put him out of mind.

And at any rate, she seemed determined not to marry him—to sacrifice the rest of her life, or its best years, to her father. Throughout the long day, as Rexford paced up and down his dim-lit limestone cell, his thoughts kept coming back to that; and when he came back to that he didn't care whether he was to spend the next few years in Hollisburg, New York, or jail. One place would be just as good as the other, without Ruth.

He knew that Sellers wouldn't desert him, but he was beginning to be afraid that even Sellers was no match for the power of the Pences. He was lonely; he saw no one all day except the jail attendant who brought him an unappetizing breakfast and a dinner that was worse. Even if the light from the barred window far above him had been enough to read by, he had nothing to read—except an inscription on the wall beside the barred door, a foot above his head:

HIGH-WATER MARK
FEBRUARY 7, 1884
"AND THE WATERS RECEDED FROM OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH."

Rexford hoped that his cell had been unoccupied when the waters got up that high. Then, as he reflected what such a flood must have meant to the town—water neck deep in all the stores on Main Street, for one thing—he realized that there was some reason for Pence's power. Pence and his dam had ended floods forever. True, Pence had got his percentage out of it—Sellers had described to him in gleeful detail the various exactions by which those who wanted to live in the fashionable Addition on the reclaimed bottom lands had to pay through the nose for the privilege—but the town could reasonably look on him as a public benefactor. No wonder it put up with his sudden and arbitrary punishments of crimes against his family, even if he sometimes picked the wrong man.

Then footsteps in the corridor, voices—and Clay Sellers turned the corner and came up to the door, a glum deputy sheriff behind him.

"This is a pleasure," said Rexford cheerfully. "You see, I was just thinking that I'd never heard your thoughts on the freedom of the will that you were going to lay before me the other night. And since the topic happens to be on my mind just now—especially the freedom of Mr. Pence's will ——"

Sellers had come into the cell, the iron door clanging behind him; the deputy sheriff retired to the corner of the corridor and lit a cigarette.

"So they allow smokin' here," said Sellers. "In that case I'll offer you the makin's; which I suppose they took off you along with all other movable property. Freedom of the will. Now, Friend Rexford, Mr. Pence's will ain't as free as you seem to think. You'll be out of here to-morrow. You'd have been out to-day if I hadn't been too blame busy on other matters of some urgency to fight for a hearing. But don't worry about that. If you'd been let go this morning a lot of these curbstone heroes would have talked about lynching you—not that they'd have had nerve enough to do it. But by to-morrow we'll have public opinion well informed. Might as well create a pleasant atmosphere before you walk out into the light of day."

"You seem pretty confident," Rexford said nervously. "It's only my word against their circumstantial evidence."

"Their evidence ain't so circumstantial as they think. The main thing, of course, is that you're the only man with a motive."

"You can't tell me," said Rexford, "that this bird hasn't spilled motives all along his line of march. Anybody that had ever talked to him—good heavens, I forgot he's lying half dead."

"Not so bad as that. Probably to-morrow he'll be able to talk; and then let's see what becomes of their circumstantial evidence. Herb's got his faults but I don't think he'd say you hit him if he knew who did. Of course, bein' hit from behind, he may not have seen it.

"But now as to this circumstantial evidence. Herb's watch was smashed when he fell. It stopped at twelve minutes past nine. Doc Peebles is willin' to swear to that. I don't say he ain't afraid of Pence, but he's got a conscience. And Colonel Hollis—Ruth, too—will swear it was half past nine when you left the house. We all know the colonel's watch—they set the town clock by it. And while he's got his faults, nobody would suspect him of an inclination to perjury."

"Does Pence know this?"

"Pence knows Herb's watch stopped at nine-twelve. I ain't told him what time you left the house."

"But if you told him," said Rexford, "maybe he'd——"

"Call off the police? Well, maybe he would. Thereby gainin' great reputation as a just man. But if we spring this on him in court you'll get off just the same and Pence will be shown up as a man a little bit prone to jump at conclusions, even when they mean jail for somebody else. In fact, if we can get away with that, I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Pence will be very quiet for some time to come."

Rexford regarded his blandly smiling counselor with growing amazement.

"You're a vindictive person, aren't you, behind that cheerful grin? Well, more power to you. As for me, I'd almost got to sympathizing with Pence—and certainly with Herb. That was a pretty hard knock he got."

"Well, you needn't waste too much sympathy on Herb. When Herb tried to call on you and Ruth last night he had a gun in his

pocket. Oh, yes. Doc Peebles wouldn't have mentioned that, of his own accord; but Colonel Hollis had discovered it, and when I suggested that it was queer nobody had seen it when Herb was bein' put to bed it turned out that the doc and the nurse had both seen it, now they remembered. You ain't going to be the one to come worst out of this, Friend Rexford. I wouldn't go so far as to say that you could qualify as a Nemesis, but—how are they treating you here? No third degrees?"

"You seem to have scared Flint," said Rexford, "and the sheriff hasn't bothered me."

"You're Flint's case. They lay off each other's business."

"But the meals," Rexford groaned. "Well, they make Dan Cullen's look like the Ritz."

"Well, you stand this another day and to-morrow night we'll have you right up against Dan's counter large as life—unless you're asked up to the Hollises."

Sellers watched him flush slowly.

"How—how are they taking this?" Rexford asked finally.

"Why, didn't you know?" Sellers' amazement seemed genuine; nobody could have known that he was only giving himself a chance to watch the wheels go round. "Colonel Hollis has been here twice to-day and Ruth's been here three times, tryin' to see you. But Flint got his back up and wouldn't even let 'em send in a note."

Rexford turned a handspring.

"Stone walls do not a prison make," he said cheerfully, "nor iron bars a cage."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Of the leading citizens of Hollisburg the one who was least interested in Herb and Rexford that day was George Blades. And yet it had been Blades whose first exclamation, when Rexford telephoned the news of Herb's injury to the Pences, had set St. Elmo Pence's mind turning toward the idea that Rexford had done it. Blades' remark had been instinctive—for a week he had been trying unobtrusively to set the Pences against Rexford and his efforts lately had flowered into this antagonism which had culminated in the fight at the Country Club.

Blades had expected vaguely, when he began, that he could bring Herb to the point of driving Rexford, somehow, out of town. But if he were right in suspecting that Rexford was a detective sent to investigate automobile thefts, Rexford would try to keep out of the way of trouble, or anything else that stood between him and his errand. Consequently, nobody was more surprised than Blades when it had seemed at least possible that Rexford had tried to kill Herb. Either his sudden infatuation for Ruth had made him reckless, or ——

Or he wasn't a detective, after all. And it was this possibility that set Blades to pondering next day, in the garage office. If Rexford had really been a detective, he would probably have made the fact known when he was arrested for a felony. He would have sent a call for help to his home office. He had done nothing of the sort; he seemed to be relying on Sellers. So either Rexford wasn't a detective, in which case Blades had done a great deal of work for nothing; or he was a detective working for Sellers alone—and Sellers was still at large.

Something was wrong. Blades felt that all morning; and he was convinced of it, toward noon, when Raney drove a Buick into the garage. Rufe, behind locked doors in the repair shop in the back yard, was doing things to the Dodge that Raney had brought in two days before; and Blades managed to get Raney's car into the garage, and Raney out of the car, without attracting any special attention from the colored boys who were busy at odd jobs about the place. But then he took Raney into the office, shut the door behind him, and said in furious stifled tones:

"What's the idea? Come down here in broad daylight with one car after another for Main Street to look at! Do you want to get us all sent up?"

"I certainly don't," said Raney. "That's why I'm tryin' to get these things into circulation. I went out to look at this one this morning and it was stickin' out into the breeze. One end of the stack had been taken off."

"Taken off? What kind of a haystack do you——"

"It wasn't a very good haystack," Raney admitted. "In fact it was just enough of a haystack to hide a car. But nobody could have seen the thing from outside—I'll swear to that. Either somebody went to lookin' around or else maybe the wind blew the thing loose."

"There wasn't enough wind last night to

blow over a haystack, you boob—not the worst haystack in the world. Didn't you see any tracks?"

"The rain'd washed 'em away, if there was any. But I said to myself, 'Boy, you better get this car off the premises before whoever was lookin' at it comes back.'"

"Let me get caught with it, eh? Raney, if you pull a boner that trips me you'll go away with me—as far as I go and maybe farther."

"I ain't a-goin' to trip you, George. I thought if you could get this one started to wherever you send 'em I could bring the other one down after it gets dark to-night. That's the last one."

Blades was thinking it over.

"I guess you're right," he said. "Better hop right back to the farm—no telling who may be prowling around while you're away. Bring the other one down late to-night—half past ten or eleven. Hurry up, now. I'll tell Rufe."

But he didn't tell Rufe; for it was becoming apparent to Blades that things were happening which might make it necessary to do something, or go somewhere, in a hurry. He travels the fastest who travels alone. They had been a good team, he and Rufe; but it was time for him to rise into circles where Rufe wouldn't be able to follow him.

Just how this ascension was to be accomplished, without dragging Rufe along, Blades didn't know. The Dodge could be shipped to Cincinnati to-morrow; but he might as well hold one Buick till the other had been brought in. He could get all three away to Ketzner by the middle of next week, and then, his used-car business liquidated, he'd be ready to take charge of Pence's real estate.

The middle of next week! As the day wore on Blades felt some unintelligible sense of approaching evil. It was nothing he saw, nothing he heard, nothing he could reason out; but something was wrong. And about the middle of the afternoon he realized, suddenly, that the man who had just come out of Meservy's pool room with a fresh-bought cigar, a man whose face was strange to him, was the same man whom he had seen three or four times to-day—always within sight of the garage. And Blades knew every face in Hollisburg. This man was a stranger—and he obviously wasn't from one of the near-by farms. He had a city look.

He would have been more disturbed if he had known that behind the drawn shade of Bill Rexford's attic window, in Sellers' story-and-a-half house on the side street, another stranger in town was watching the yard behind the garage. But the question of numbers didn't count, anyway. Twelve hours after the dangerous Rexford had been locked up another detective had appeared to take up his watch. They were closing in.

Blades showed no sign of agitation when he went out, about five o'clock, to stroll to the Pences' house, see Leila, and perhaps look in on the stricken Herb. If he were under surveillance it wouldn't do to show signs of haste or alarm. Nevertheless, three blocks down the street he stopped, glanced back. No one in sight. But at the next corner he saw a figure, unfamiliar before to-day, at the intersection of streets a block distant. Here in the fenceless lawns of Pence's Addition he could be shadowed from a parallel street better than in the one he was on; and certainly he was being shadowed. He would have to think, and think quickly. The first thing to do was to make certain, in so far as he could, that any blow that fell could be turned on Rufe. And there was no doubt about the best way to do that.

So when Leila received him on the wide, awning-shadowed porch, where no outer eye could see what went on behind the screen of climbing roses, she found him unusually demonstrative.

"You poor little girl, you must have had a terrible day," Blades suggested, his arms about her. "It wasn't fair that your father should have gone down to work and left you to look after everything. How is he?"

"Herb, you mean? Oh, he stirs, and tosses, and moans, but he hasn't really come to. The nurse says he seems to be improving, though; and Doctor Peebles thinks he'll be conscious some time to-night."

"Poor old Herb! Rotten trick to hit him from behind. I suppose he'll be laid up for quite a while."

"Doctor Peebles doesn't know, yet. I know what you're thinking of, George. We'll have to put off the wedding."

"We certainly couldn't have a big church wedding while Herb is like this," Blades agreed. "And I suppose we'll have to have a big church wedding."

"I wonder," said Leila. "You know, George, since—since last night I've done a

lot of thinking. Things that look important when everything is going smoothly don't—don't look so big when trouble comes, do they? I'm so happy that Herb isn't going to die—and I hate Ruth so——"

"I can't understand the girl," Blades confessed. "She must have been trying to make Herb jealous, and she fooled with something that was loaded."

"I'll never speak to her again," Leila vowed. "And she was my best friend, George. I don't know who can be trusted, now. I don't want to see anybody, just now—except dad and you."

"Think you could do without seeing your father for a few weeks, when Herb is a little better?" Blades asked, smiling.

"What do you mean?"

"Why, we'll have to put off the wedding if we mean to have a big one. No telling how long Herb may be laid up. On the other hand, he isn't going to—have anything happen to him; so if we wanted to get married quietly——"

Leila squeezed his hand.

"I'm so glad you were thinking of that, too."

Within ten minutes they had it all settled. They would be married on Saturday if Herb's condition permitted. On the same condition they would take their honeymoon trip to the Thousand Islands; but if Herb were still in bad shape they'd stay at home.

"I know father would like to see us settled," said Leila, "and there won't be any trouble bringing him around. Stay for supper and we'll tell him about it."

"I can't do that," said Blades. "Too much to do down at the garage if we're going to be married day after to-morrow." Above all, he was thinking, there were certain books that had to be burned—books that would tell nothing to the casual investigator but that could be made to mean a great deal if Rufe, under inquisition, should try to shift a share of the blame to the man who had double crossed him. Rufe, he knew, would be suspicious of this marriage, but he could do nothing. Even his suspicions might be stilled for a few days by the argument that it would give protection to them both. But Blades knew that if trouble came there would be a big difference between St. Elmo Pence's son-in-law and that son-in-law's partner; just as he knew that there would be a big difference between an actual and a prospective son-in-law.

"I suppose you'll be terribly rushed," Leila admitted. "So will I, running off with half a trousseau. But somehow I'll feel safer when we're married so we can—can face things together. My goodness, you never know what's going to happen, do you?"

"You certainly don't," said Blades. "I suppose I can run up and look at Herb for a minute."

"I think so. Don't mind if Miss Hubbard tells you to keep out. I was up there a good part of the day but there didn't seem to be anything I could do. She's so dreadfully efficient."

But Miss Hubbard didn't tell him to keep out. She greeted him with a nod and a professional finger-to-lips gesture which didn't prevent her from talking herself, in an undertone.

"He's restless," she said, "but he's never really come out of it. I gave him a sedative at two o'clock, but it seems to be working off." She nodded toward the half-filled glass on the bedside table. "You can go up and look at him if you want to; but don't say anything. I'm going down to speak to Miss Leila for a minute."

Blades tiptoed to the bedside and looked down at the bandaged head and the flushed face. Herb was a boob but he deserved better luck than to be slugged from behind by the man who had taken away his girl. Then, to his amazement, Herb opened one eye, both eyes, turned, sighed, and looked up at him.

"Hello, George," he muttered. "What have you done with Rufe?"

"Rufe?"

"Sure. Rufe. What did he have against me? Why didn't he stand up an' fight, like Rexford?"

"Rufe? What——"

"Must've hit me with a ball bat. Head—hurts. Did he get away?"

"Did Rufe hit you?" Blades demanded.

"Feel my head if you don't believe me. Saw him—plain as I see you. Lightning flash and——"

With another groaning sigh he tried to rise. Blades slipped an arm under his shoulders and held the glass to his lips.

"Here, old-timer. Drink a little of this."

Herb sank back, still muttering; waved a feeble hand for a moment, then turned on his side.

Blades was waiting by the door when Miss Hubbard came back.

"I'm afraid he's still delirious," he said. "Too bad, isn't it?" He slid his hat under his arm and tiptoed out; but it was hard work not to throw his hat up into the air and whoop. This was incredible luck.

Rufe was hunched morosely in the swivel chair in the garage office. As Blades came in he started up, obviously alarmed.

"George! They're on us. I've lamped two dicks—had their eye on us all day."

Blades unlocked the desk and took out three or four small account books.

"Then this stuff goes into a bonfire as soon as it's dark. Nobody will have anything on me then."

"On you! George, if you lay down on me——"

Blades grinned at him without sympathy.

"I won't lay down on you. Nobody will have anything on you, so far as the automobile business is concerned. But why the devil did you slug Herb?"

Rufe sank back into the chair, staring.

"How—how——"

"He told me himself. Came to for a couple of seconds while I was at the house just now. No, nobody else heard him. I was with him, alone; and I filled him up as hard as I dared with the deep-sleep stuff. But he'll come to again to-morrow——"

"I'll swear he couldn't have seen me."

"But he did see you. By the lightning."

Rufe began to swear in a monotonous undertone.

"Same damn luck I've always had," he said presently. "I was sure he didn't have time to spot me; but when I saw who he was I pulled my punch. If I'd've tapped him the way I started he'd be in a coffin right now. But I caught myself when I seen who it was. Oh, he wasn't the one I was after. I wanted this Rexford. And all day long I've been thinkin' that if I hadn't got him one way I had another. What are we goin' to do now?"

Blades was humming absently.

"Well, if I were you I'd take what cash there is in the safe and start for the State line. As for me—I'm going to stay here and settle down."

Rufe rose slowly, glaring into his partner's eyes.

"You couldn't have framed it," he said in an undertone. "It was just my damn luck. But it couldn't have broke better for you if you had framed it. I take the petty cash—there might be as much as a hundred and fifty bucks—and dodge the dicks and try to get down to Louisville. And you stay here and marry the Pence girl, and when they drop on you you pin it on me. You ain't goin' to burn them books, are you? They're mostly in my handwritin'. You'll use 'em for evidence and Pence'll get you off. You——"

His spring forward was quick as the flicker of a whiplash; but Blades stepped back as quickly and Rufe looked into the mouth of a gun protruding from Blades' coat pocket.

"You said it," he remarked lightly. "I'm going to do exactly what you say; and you're going to take the loose cash—you can have the fifty or so that I've got on me, if that helps—and go your way. And the beauty of it is that I didn't frame you. It just happened. It was just your luck—and mine. And all I can say in farewell, old buddy, is that I hope your luck will pick up a little bit. Otherwise you won't get by the dicks."

Rufe subsided slowly.

"I guess you're right," he admitted. "Well—no use my makin' a break just now. Wait till it's dark."

They dined, presently, at Dan Cullen's, then came back to the garage. Rufe, used to being shadowed, could easily pick out the mysterious stranger who was looking in the window of the music store up the street. But he said nothing; he was, apparently, resigned. He went back to the garage, stowed away the bills he found in the safe while Blades' cynical eyes rested on him, and then drew his cap down over his eyes.

"So long, George," he said wearily. "I wish you luck with your wife, and your father-in-law, and your town."

"I'll have it," Blades admitted. "And luck to you, old-timer. Send me a picture postal some time."

His hand was on his gun, for he supposed that Rufe might still turn on him in desperation. But Rufe didn't. He slipped back through the garage, Blades following him; crossed the back yard; slipped the loose board out of the fence—and, after peering out a moment into the dark alley, stepped through.

"Take care of yourself, George," he whispered as he replaced the board. "It's a nice thrivin' town. My love to Pence."

Blades saw him vanish into the blackness of the alley shadows; even if there were a

detective on this side, as wasn't likely, he could hardly see him. After a moment Blades strolled back into the garage, humming softly.

Rufe emerged cautiously on the back street, looked up and down. Nobody in sight. There was a car at the curb, lights off; the house before which it stood was dark except for the kitchen. Rufe sidled up to the car, peered at the gasoline gauge, saw there was enough for the fifty miles which would take him to the State line—and in a moment he was driving around the corner, making as much speed as he dared toward the river road.

He made it, without interference; drove down a mile or so, then turned cautiously aside to the construction camp. Farther down there were lights in the workmen's shanties, but here there was no one about. Rufe edged up cautiously to the shack that housed the explosives. The door was still ajar. Now if the luck that had broken so incredibly badly against him would only even up for five minutes——

And it did. Nobody interfered with him; and presently Rufe drove a heavily loaded car very cautiously back to the river road and turned westward toward the dam.

## CHAPTER XXV.

Colonel Hollis mused over a stogy while Ruth was washing up the supper dishes. He hadn't been surprised by Pence's statement that the mortgages would be foreclosed; he had seen it coming ever since Sunday. Still, it threatened to confront him with a situation, and the colonel wasn't used to looking situations in the face.

Another thing that disturbed him was Ruth's relation to Rexford. He had ventured to ask her a few questions at dinner, with the apologetic diffidence required of modern parents, and what little he had learned was disconcerting. The young people were in love but they didn't expect to get married. They had no plans. When the colonel pressed her, as closely as he dared, Ruth had merely said that Rexford belonged in New York, and she belonged on the hill, and that was all there was to it.

Slow as the colonel was to come to uncomfortable conclusions, he couldn't miss this one. His daughter couldn't marry the man she wanted because she and her father and her sweetheart were all broke. Nothing plus nothing, plus nothing again, equals nothing but nothing. And for these petty and sordid reasons his girl was steeling herself to send away the man she loved, was even thinking of going to work. Well, well! Something would have to be done about this. Of course anything might happen between now and October——

The colonel turned over this familiar and comforting supposition and finally cast it out. He'd been fooling himself long enough. The age of miracles was past. Something would have to be done; for it was unthinkable that Ruth, who had so gallantly stuck by the sinking ship of the Hollis fortunes, should throw away her own future for him. Something would have to be done and he would have to do it. And by the time Ruth had finished the dishes he had come to the conclusion that only one thing was possible—to try to make some compromise with Pence.

Not that Pence had any bowels of mercy. The colonel didn't deceive himself about that. But—the first mortgage falling due was on the house. And the house, in these times, wasn't worth what it should be. The Hollis Building was another and more considerable matter. Its present rental value wasn't much; the colonel had the worst-paying tenants in town, partly because he owned the oldest of the office buildings, partly because he was known to be soft-hearted and accessible to hard-luck stories. But if Pence owned it he could probably make it bring in money.

The colonel thought he saw a way out. Pence, if he had the chance, would certainly prefer to take the Hollis Building in October, and the house later in the winter, rather than the other way around. Let Pence take the Hollis Building at once, and perhaps the lots on Whitcomb Avenue if he demanded his pound of flesh. But the colonel could live on till the New Year in the Hollis mansion; he would still have the old home and the dignity that went with it. And with the home, and the devising of a few polite fictions, it would be easy to persuade Ruth that Pence had relented and would continue something like the old arrangement, by which the mortgages were regarded as advances against the ultimate profits of the history of Hollis County.

Then neither Ruth nor her young man need hesitate on the colonel's account. They

would think he was provided for; they could go on and marry. True, by the middle of the winter they would discover that he had pulled the wool over their eyes; but they would be married by that time—too late for the false pride now holding them back to do any damage. And after that? Well, the colonel had no intention of being a burden on his son-in-law. No, by the Eternal! Physical wants were few at his age; he could retire with his manuscript and the remnant of his books to some secluded spot—whether a cottage in the country or a boarding house in town made little difference—to lead the life of a hermit while he gave all the energy of his declining years to the completion of his book.

He rose, with such elation as he hadn't felt for years. Ruth was stubborn; she'd never marry, never think of herself at all, if she thought it would mean deserting him in a time of trouble. But he'd fool her. He'd commit a pious fraud. One heard much in these modern times, the colonel reflected, about women living their own lives. Well, he was going to trick Ruth into living hers. Pretty crafty of him. He could turn all sorts of tricks if he set his mind to that sort of thing. Of course, in turning this one he'd need the help of St. Elmo Pence; but he could reasonably count on getting that. His proposal would mean money in Pence's pocket; and if worst came to the worst he might even give Pence some hint of his true reason, which ought to be sufficient.

"Ruth," he called, "I'm going out."

"To see Sellers?" she asked eagerly.

"No, to see Mr. Pence. Oh, not to humiliate myself; not to make any concessions. Not at all. Merely to make sure of his intentions; to learn what he purposes to do, so that we may lay our plans accordingly. You'd better have them lock up the house; I may not return till late."

For such an occasion he must dress properly. The silk hat, the frock coat, and, final touch, the scepter of the Hollis regalia—a gold-headed ebony cane inscribed in fine Spencerian script: "To General George Washington Hollis, from his associates in the Indiana Constitutional Convention. 1851." Thus attired the colonel felt quite able to hold his own with Pence.

But at the foot of the stairs he found Ruth, bareheaded, but evidently intending to go out.

"I can't wait here by myself while he's in jail and you're talking to Mr. Pence. Let me go with you."

"You can't do that," the colonel cried frantically, seeing his grand structure of deceit in danger of collapse.

"Why not? We're both in it."

"Matters of business, child, are not in woman's sphere. You needn't stay at home if you don't want to, but I am responsible for our family's business dealings with Mr. Pence. Couldn't you call on some one?"

"There's nobody I want to see." She thought it over. "Oh, I suppose I might as well go to the movies. 'Robin Hood' is on this week; that ought to take my mind off things if anything will. Can you stop at the theater for me on your way home? Then we might go around and see if Sellers knows anything new."

In the gathering dusk the colonel walked slowly along Willow Boulevard, the river-front driveway bounding Pence's Addition, the most fashionable street in town. Bungalows to the left, to the right the river; the sidewalk on that side was girded by an iron railing, and beyond, at the bottom of a six-foot concrete retaining wall, was the gravelly bed through which the river flowed in summer. And, thanks to Pence's dam, that bed now contained it in winter too.

One stucco bungalow after another, each with its white trellis marking off the back-yard line behind its white stucco garage. From open doors, from screened porches, came the clatter of voices, the shrill screaming of phonographs, the crying of children. All this had been cornfield a few years ago. The colonel had to admit that Pence had done a good deal for Hollisburg.

But more for Pence. There was a rather terrible social pressure on young couples who married and wanted to count as somebody. They had to live in Pence's Addition; if they possibly could they had to live on Willow Boulevard. Naturally a good many tried both who couldn't. Pence's terms were harsh. His flood-insurance rates were exorbitant; but there was no use trying to buy land in the Addition if you didn't take out flood insurance. Perfectly needless, of course, but you had to do it. Pence's real-estate company drove a hard bargain on second mortgages; Pence's bank, free from any serious competition, was none too easy on first mortgages. Foreclosures were prompt and merciless and there had been a

good many of them since the Addition was opened. More than one young couple had lost their savings and faced a cheerless future because they felt that they had to live where their friends lived. The colonel had heard of these things in the big cities but it was unnatural to introduce such troubles into Hollisburg, where land was cheap—if it happened to be in some other quarter.

A bad business. A bad business. Progress, the colonel conceded, was on the whole a good thing. The world couldn't stand still; the old well-mannered ease of Hollisburg had passed forever. Progress was bound to come; but at every forward step Pence collected his percentage. In one way or another he had levied on everybody in town. Payment for service, yes; but double what the service was worth. Worse than that, he had debauched the town. A whole generation had taken him as its model. Hustle, pep, sharp practice and hard dealing; ostentatious display of money acquired by methods that would hardly meet the approval of a gentleman. If progress had to come, might it not have come in some other way, under some other leadership—without loss of contact with the older standards?

Ah, well! It was too late now to regret what might have been done better. After all, he, the colonel, wasn't a man of action. He was a student, a critic, a philosopher. He would write the history of Hollis County instead of making it. And yet——

But here he was in front of Pence's castle. The hour of trial was at hand.

St. Elmo Pence, too, had been thinking things over that night. Recent happenings had shaken him up. His only son had had a narrow escape from death; his only daughter was to be married day after to-morrow. Of course he had been looking forward to Leila's marriage; but its sudden imminence rather upset him, none the less. His little girl was going away from him; that was what it amounted to even if she and her husband continued to live in his house. He was handing her over to George Blades. No doubt it was all right, but he wished they wouldn't be in such a hurry. He had feebly tried to persuade Leila to put it off; but after all, a date had already been set; and if they would have to substitute a quiet home wedding for the grand church affair that they had planned they might as well have it now as later. Things were slipping out of his hands. Blades would take over the direction of the real-estate business; before long St. Elmo Pence would have his grandchildren to think about; the day of his autocratic control of Hollisburg was approaching its end.

But he wasn't through yet. He'd see that justice was done to this young ruffian who had attacked his son—a good stiff penitentiary sentence. He'd take no more nonsense from that pompous old fraud Hollis, whose sour-faced daughter had got Herb into this trouble——

And then a white-coated colored boy appeared with the news that Colonel Hollis wanted to see him.

What earthly errand could Hollis have here to-night? Ah! The mortgages, of course. Probably the old fool had gone on thinking that Pence would let him keep his house, even after Ruth's rejection of Herb. To-day he had been disillusioned; and he was probably trying to beg off. Well, he'd get what was coming to him.

"He's on the porch, sir," said the boy.

"All right. I'll talk to him."

A full, rotund figure, pink-faced, cream-clad, Pence appeared in the doorway like the incarnate god of Prosperity. In his presence Colonel Hollis' silk hat and frock coat looked their age; and the colonel too. Pence was touched to a momentary compunction; the poor old fossil wasn't worth the powder to blow him up. Might as well let him down easy—but he was certainly going to be let down.

"Well, colonel," said Pence with the official joviality of the president of the chamber of commerce, "what brings you here? Sit down."

The colonel laid his hat and stick on a wicker table and settled into a wicker armchair, loaded with florid cushions.

"A matter of—er—rather private business," he confessed. "That is, if you're able to discuss business to-night. How's the boy? We're most frightfully distressed about——"

"Getting on all right. Still sleeping, but he'll probably be able to tell us about it to-morrow."

"I'm delighted to hear that. Delighted. Aside from the fact that the unfortunate event occurred on my property we all know the unhappy circumstances which——"

The reference to "my property" had been unfortunate; for it had persuaded Pence

that the old man still thought he was going to be let off. The banker stiffened but was still mindful of the duties of hospitality.

"Yes, yes. We won't discuss that. Can I offer you a little something, colonel?"

"No, thanks. At my age, and with my blood pressure—you're a younger man than I, Mr. Pence; but your collar fits you pretty tight and I wonder that you still keep it up."

The colonel had only wanted to be neighborly; he grew up in a day when everybody's miseries were the chief topic of conversation in Hollisburg. But Pence frowned.

"I can look after my health, colonel. Jasper! A Scotch high ball—for one. What's this matter of business, now?"

The colonel cleared his throat.

"The information you gave me over the telephone to-day, sir, was not unexpected. About the mortgages. I had realized that they were going to fall due pretty soon; and it will serve no purpose to deny that I don't see how I'm going to find the money to meet them."

He paused; Pence took a long drink from his high ball, and set the glass down with a vicious bang.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing right now, colonel. You don't get another cent out of me. I mean it. I'm through."

"You told me that this morning, sir," said the colonel with dignity, "and I assumed you meant it."

"Then what's your idea?"

"Mr. Pence, the Hollis Building has a certain value. I don't say that if it were flung on the market for immediate sale it would be likely to realize more than the amount of the mortgages. Still it has a value—a commercial value. I'm afraid I can't say as much for the old homestead."

"You didn't talk that way when you borrowed money on mortgages on the old homestead."

"Six thousand dollars, Mr. Pence. Six thousand dollars all told. For a place that cost more than fifty, half a century ago. Ah, well—it's run down; I know that. It's out of the way for present tastes. You, sir, came to town too late to know the great days when the grand old mansion on the hill was the center of a society which had its faults, no doubt; but which had a manner, Mr. Pence; a manner. Ah, well! We must get down to details. I have certain reasons, Mr. Pence, not purely sentimental, for wanting to retain the homestead as long as possible. I realize that that will not be long; but if you could arrange to make some sort of transfer so that that October mortgage could be shifted to the Hollis Building——"

"What sort of swindle are you trying to put over on me?"

"Swindle, sir! Watch your language, Mr. Pence. Have a care. I propose a simple business transaction which will have the result of giving you the Hollis Building somewhat earlier than you would ordinarily get it—in October, to be exact, instead of December or January. And instead of giving up the house in October I'd hold it till the middle of winter, when the next mortgage falls due. After that, sir, I shall yield you what will have become your own."

Pence was frowning into his tall glass.

"I don't get this at all," he announced. "Why should you want to ball everything up by that kind of jugglery?"

"I have some—er—personal reasons."

"I suppose so," Pence jeered. "Hollis, I didn't think it was in you. I can't see through this thing at all; and there aren't many business layouts that I can't see through at a glance. But it won't do you any good. I don't see your game but I know there's something wrong if you want to give me your only income-producing property two months early so as to hold on to that old ruin you live in. Not even you would be crazy enough to do that. No, sir. You've figured out some way to beat me out of one or the other, or maybe both. But you won't do it. That mortgage on the house, due October 1st, will be foreclosed if you don't have the cash down at the bank on October 1st. I can wait for the Hollis Building; but sooner or later I'll get them both. Think you can beat me, do you, at my own game?"

The colonel picked up his hat and stick.

"No, sir, I never entertained any such idea. And I realize now my credulity in supposing that you could ever understand anything but what you appropriately term your own game. The instincts of a gentleman, sir, are not in you. I serve notice on you, Mr. Pence, that hereafter, when I pass you on the street, I shall ignore you."

Pence laughed harshly.

"That's good. Ignore me, will you? Jasper! Another one! Why, you poor old barnacle, don't you know you'd have starved

to death ten years ago if I'd ignored you? What are you going to live on?"

"I have my resources, sir."

"Those Whitcomb Avenue lots, I suppose."

"Well, sir, they're not to be disregarded. I am aware that I still owe you fifty dollars that you lent me to pay the taxes. You were obliging enough not to take a mortgage but I shall pay that obligation with the others."

"Take a mortgage on those lots? You couldn't sell them for cow pasture. You can't sell them for fifty dollars. Everybody comes to the Addition."

"Very possibly that is true," observed the colonel. "Our family's straitened circumstances are well known. Nevertheless, sir—from this night on I shall ignore you."

"You won't," Pence declared. "Within a week after I've taken over the Hollis Building you'll come whining to me for some kind of disguised hand-out. You can't support yourself."

The colonel was stung by fury to a great declaration.

"I am not afraid of work, Mr. Pence."

"Work? What kind of work could you do? Is there any job on earth—yes, I know one. You can have it now, if you want it. They need a new night watchman at the dam; that's about your speed."

The colonel's hand, resting on the gold head of his cane, shook with anger; his eyes flashed; his shirt front heaved itself up.

"Mr. Pence, I shall not descend to an exchange of abusive personalities. In that field I recognize your superiority. Good night, sir."

As he put on his silk hat a telephone bell began to ring, inside the house. It kept on, insistently; but Pence heard the patter of Leila's feet on the stairs, and disregarded it. Leila's telephone business was of incredible volume. And Hollis' last remark had struck down deep into St. Elmo Pence, down to the sore spot that had festered in him ever since his first day in Hollisburg, when he had observed, and wondered at, the respect shown by the old residents toward Colonel Hollis.

"So you recognize my superiority in something, do you? Well, by Jupiter! I'm surprised. I thought you old families up on the hill had the idea that you were superior to everybody in everything. Bah! Hollis, you and your kind make me sick. You had this town once, and you didn't know what to do with it. You let it go to pieces—slide out of your hands. I came along and picked it up and put it back on the map and what thanks have I ever got from you? Call yourselves an aristocracy. Hell! Aristocracy means the best people and the best people are the people who make things go. I've made this town and it's my town and I'll do what I want with it.

"Why, Hollis, you've been living on me for the last ten years—always with this old threadbare story of your history that you've got to finish—need money to live on while you complete your life work. Life work! Who cares about the history of Hollis County? You wouldn't sell a hundred copies, even if you ever finished it. I've made the only history of Hollis County that anybody cares about; and I've supported you for ten years because I didn't like to see an old landmark washed away. Some men, when they make money, go in for art and buy Rembrandts and stuff like that. I've supported you instead; I've kept you hung in the front parlor with all the dust on you as the most ramshackle historic antiquity Hollis County could show. And now that I'm tired of you I'll throw you out on the junk heap like any other——"

A clatter of soft-shod feet on the floor within, and Leila appeared in the doorway, white and trembling.

"Father! They've blown up the dam!"

## CHAPTER XXVI.

St. Elmo Pence rose slowly, clinging to his wicker chair; his face was as purple as Leila's was pale.

"The dam," he muttered. "It can't be. Who'd do it? It isn't true!"

"But it is," Leila wailed, her voice rising to a shriek. "They phoned from the club. They heard the explosion and the water's running out of the pool! Oh, my! oh, my! Oh, what——"

A din of confused shouts rose down the street. From one of the near-by bungalows came a woman's scream, shrill and prolonged. A rising murmur; and then, farther back in the town, broke out the clangor of the fire bell.

St. Elmo Pence clenched his hands, swallowed, swallowed again, pulled at his collar, and fell forward on the grass rug. Leila's wail died to a horrified gurgle; she swayed.

"Stop it!" the colonel barked. "Don't you faint, Leila; don't you dare faint. Enough of you Pences on your backs now. There—that's better. You run upstairs and tell Miss Hubbard and you and she bring Herb down—quick! The two of you can carry him. Now where are those boys——"

They were there, shaking in an agony of fear, the two house boys starting back at sight of the prostrate Pence, while Berry, the chauffeur, came running down from the farther end of the porch.

"Berry!" The colonel's voice cracked like a shot. "Get out the car—the big car. Hurry up. Confound it, I'll lay my stick over your back! Bring it to the steps, and stop here. You boys take Mr. Pence and get ready to put him in." He peered inside; Leila and the nurse, at Herb's head and feet, were already bringing him down the stairs.

"This way," the colonel called. "Here, Berry." The big car shot out from behind the house, then slowed down as the driver caught the colonel's eye. The other boys lifted Pence in, then took Herb from the two women and laid him beside his father.

"Everybody here?" the colonel asked. "All right. Now, Leila, drive right up to my house and stay there till the trouble's over. Here's my key. And you'd better stop at Doctor Peebles' office on the way, if you can find him."

"Aren't you coming?" Leila demanded from the front seat. "Why, colonel—you'll be drowned!"

"Drive on!" he ordered. "I'll look after myself."

The car shot out into the street and the colonel followed it at a more dignified pace. The shouting was incessant, now; in front of the bungalows down the street people were running to and fro, trying to start cars, dragging out furniture in senseless panic. Panic—that was it. Pence's Addition was in a panic, the town was in a panic; and the man to whom the town would have looked for leadership had collapsed.

"By the Eternal!" growled Colonel Hollis. "They need somebody to bring them up sharp."

He ran, as fast as he could, down to the corner where a score of frightened people were trying to get their cars out of each other's way. Some of them were still trying to load in clocks, books, boxes, pictures. They were jammed. Children were wailing, men were shouting contradictory orders, women were crying helplessly, and over it all rose the horrible brazen voice of the fire bell.

"My mother was at Johnstown," a woman wailed from the nearest lawn. "Oh, Bert, do hurry—do hurry."

"Stop!" the colonel roared. "Attention!"

And they stopped and gave attention. It was the colonel's oratorical voice, the voice that could fill the fairgrounds on the Fourth of July, that could resound all over the courthouse square at a political meeting. But there was an iron note in it to-night that Hollisburg had never heard. It was the voice of William Hollis, heartening his settlers behind the stockade to beat off the Indians; the voice of General George Washington Hollis rallying his brigade at Buena Vista. It was authority, innate and unquestioned; and authority was what Hollisburg needed to-night.

"This isn't Johnstown," the colonel shouted. "The valley's a mile wide. You haven't got all the time in the world, but don't lose your heads.

"There was thirty-four feet of water in the reservoir this morning. That's less than half the volume that went into the eighty-four flood, and you've all seen the marks of that flood on the courthouse and jail. I was on the flood commission and I know. On the other side of Emery Street you'll be safe; at most you'll get your feet wet.

"Now load those cars with women and children. No men—the women can drive. Run down to Emery Street, then get out and make the first man you meet bring your car back. Anybody that can't find a place in the first load go upstairs and stay there. You'll have time to get out."

There was a swirl, a rushing murmur, from the river bed across the street.

"Here she comes!" shouted a man in the background.

"Yes, you white-livered coward," the colonel shouted, "here she comes. But you'll all have time to get away. See?" He crossed Willow Boulevard to the pavement along the river bed, peered over. The water was rising fast, in angry swirls, but it was still two feet below the curb. The colonel leaned back against the iron railing.

"Now, you helpless, worthless sheep without a shepherd. I'm going to stay here till

every one of you is out of sight. If anybody's drowned I'll be the first. So long as you can see my hat, you're all right. Now do what I told you. Cal Truman! Your wife can drive your car. Leave her to look after the children. You run down to Turpie Street and pass them the same orders. Let's see if you deserved that D. S. C. you got in France. Van Sickles, you're a bachelor. Go down the boulevard and pass the word. Never mind your things—they'll stay here, with maybe a little mud on them. Get the children out and leave your phonographs. Hurry, and keep your heads!"

They hurried but somehow they *did* keep their heads. Perhaps they were helped by the spectacle of Oliver Perry Morton Hollis, his back against the iron railing, his silk hat on his head, his hand resting lightly on the gold-headed ebony stick. The water was rising with a roar, now. But it had had four miles to come and thousands of acres of bottom land to spread over before it reached the town. The colonel thought his calculation was correct; he stuck to his belief even after the water had crept over the retaining wall and was swirling about his feet. The first actual touch of it was cold, cold as death; but you could get used to it.

There came a trickle down the inner gutter. It had broken over the wall far up the boulevard. But the houses beyond were empty now; the lawns, covered with the first spreading sweep of water, were empty but for books, clocks, sofa cushions, chairs, carried out in the first panic and dropped when the colonel had begun giving orders. There was still shouting and confusion farther back in town but Willow Boulevard seemed to have been cleared.

The water had reached the colonel's knees by now. His task was ended; he was free to get away. But it was slow walking through the swirling current, rising higher every moment. He crossed the street, found the water midway up his thighs. Then a man splashed down the side street—Cal Truman.

"They're all out, colonel. Hurry!"

"I'm hurrying," the colonel answered. Truman, forty feet farther inland, where the water was lower, flung out a long light rope, the end weighted with a baseball bat. It fell upstream of the colonel, swept down around his legs.

"Haul yourself up on that," Truman called. "Hang on and I'll pull. It ain't so deep over here." Hand over hand the colonel went toward him while Truman's powerful muscles strained farther inshore. Gradually they made it—still thigh deep, both of them, but not a block away from Willis Avenue where the water had hardly begun to run yet.

"You will throw it into me about that D. S. C., will you?" Truman grunted. "Come, now; hold on to my arm."

The colonel was puffing, but he reflected with some pride that his blood pressure had stood a good deal more than Pence's. And the silk hat still sat proudly on his head, the ebony cane was still clutched under his arm.

"They're scairt to death in town," Truman panted as they toiled on toward safety. "Think all Main Street's goin'."

"Main Street may get a dash of it," said the colonel, "but there isn't enough water in the reservoir to do much more than that. Any houses gone yet?"

"You'd think everything was gone, to hear people talk. Haven't seen any. There, colonel; we can go faster now. Ah!" A car swept down the street toward them, sheets of water spraying out from beneath its churning wheels. It was Clay Sellers' new Ford.

"Hop in, colonel," he called. "This boat is all right for inland waters but she's no ocean-going craft. Better hurry, too; I never got my driver's license and if Flint sees us he'll lock me up."

"Have you seen anything of Ruth?" the colonel asked.

"Ruth? Where is she?"

"She was at the movie theater."

"Then she's all right," said Sellers. "Fire regulations say it's got to be capable of bein' emptied in three minutes but I hear it didn't take 'em more than three seconds to get out. Never saw such a town. Everybody runnin' around like a chicken with its head off—the mayor as bad as the rest. They need somebody to take hold of 'em. Where's Pence?"

"Mr. Pence has had some sort of stroke," the colonel informed him. "I don't doubt that if he were able he'd take control of the situation; but he's down and out. Your wife and children safe, Truman?"

"At her mother's, up on the hill."

"Then you two boys come up to my office.

We'll get a few of the cooler heads together and try to restore some sort of order."

Ruth was sitting in the movie theater with her eyes closed. Not even Fairbanks as *Robin Hood* could take her mind off this heap of troubles that seemed to be piling up, higher every day. Suppose Rexford were freed of the charges against him? They couldn't be married. He'd have to go back to New York; she and her father would have to face the impenetrable future.

A rustle about her; the whir of the projecting machine was suddenly silenced. Jim Jackson, the manager of the theater, was out before the screen, trying desperately to keep his voice normal.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he was saying, "please keep cool. Keep cool. Please leave the house very quietly. Walk, don't run."

"What is it?" yelled a man in the balcony.

"Something's happened to the dam."

There was a scream from the front row; heads shot up suddenly, figures tumbled out into the aisle.

"Please keep cool," Jackson pleaded. Then the fire bell broke out and its hideous note would have shaken the morale of Cæsar's Tenth Legion. The audience surged up in a single wave and Ruth found herself fighting to keep her balance, hands braced against her hips and elbows out.

Luckily, somebody had broken out the emergency fire doors that opened on the alley and most of the crowd poured, pushed and tumbled out that way. In a moment Ruth was able to keep herself up; then, wedged tightly in the crowd that was forcing itself down the aisle, she was literally shot out into Main Street. It was in tumult. Groups of men with waving arms were rushing this way and that; other men, shouting, leaned from second-story windows; beneath the overriding clamor of the fire bell sounded a dissonance of horns as motor cars drove furiously up and down and through the cross streets. Ruth hooked an arm about a lamp-post and considered. Her father had gone to Pence's. But Pence would have heard of the disaster before any one else; they'd all be getting out. Already the vanguard from the nearer streets of Pence's Addition was flooding into Main Street, like a mob of Anatolian refugees. Her father would have time to reach safety.

But Bill Rexford was locked in jail. He could get out only if the sheriff brought him out. Ruth had seen the sheriff at the movie; and having once been shown through the jail with the rest of the high-school class in civics and government, she remembered that inscription on the wall—the high water mark of 1884.

Ruth had no statistics in her head about the volume of water in the reservoir. For all she knew there might be enough to swamp the whole town. But if Bill Rexford was going to be caught in the jail like a rat in a trap she would be caught with him. Running, like everybody else, but running with cool foresight, carefully avoiding the other runners who blocked the pavements and overflowed into the roadway, she set out toward the jail.

George Blades sat in the garage office, thoughtfully perusing his books. Such of them as related to dealings in used cars were, naturally, cryptic and unintelligible—except to a man who had the key. But for the necessity of keeping track of the split of profits between partners who knew each other too well to trust each other there would have been no books at all. He wasn't sure that these books could ever be read, no matter what might be discovered about his transactions by other means. But at any rate nearly all the entries had been made by Rufe. Only a few pages bore his handwriting; and these pages he laboriously cut out, taking care to remove their companion sheets in the other half of the folio. Not more than a dozen altogether; and nobody could tell that they had ever been there at all.

The shades were down. Blades stooped down on the concrete floor, lit a match and burned the sheets of paper carefully, one by one. The black ashes he ground under his heel. That was done. It shouldn't be difficult, now, for St. Elmo Pence's son-in-law to convince anybody that he had been innocently involved by a dishonest partner.

Then he heard the fire bell.

Mildly interested he stepped out on the sidewalk; found himself suddenly caught by the excitement blazing out in the shoutings and runnings; looked in vain for a fiery glare.

"Where is it?" he called to Meservy of the pool room.

"Run!" yelled Meservy, suiting the action to the word. "The dam's busted."

The dam! Blades had lived long enough in Hollisburg to see all the ancient water marks, to imbibe the tradition of past destructive floods. The town would be swept away. At any rate Pence's 'Addition would be swept away and Blades knew rather more than most people about the condition of the flood-insurance company. Pence was ruined. And if Pence was ruined, George Blades was ruined, too.

For the first time in years he didn't know what to do. Leila, his fiancée, was in the area of instant danger. She was a nice kid but she was the daughter of St. Elmo Pence. And St. Elmo Pence suddenly had changed from an asset to a liability.

Blades suddenly swerved about, dashed into the deserted garage and started his own light roadster. He climbed into the seat, then sat still a moment, cursing silently. Not a cent in the safe; not a cent in his pockets. He had given it all to Rufe. Two blocks up Main Street he could turn off toward the hill road that led up on the ridge past the old Miller place. There was safety from the floods, a way of escape from the hazards of Hollisburg—for in this general panic the watching detectives seemed to have disappeared too. Still, there was Leila. And above all there was the never-ceasing fire bell, its brazen hammering shaking loose the most firmly founded resolution, disturbing the most methodical thought. When he drove out of the door and started up Main Street he still didn't know whether he was going to turn right, toward Pence's house, or left toward the hill road.

The street was full of cars. At the first corner two approached him, side by side, crowding him toward the curb. A woman with a baby in her arms and an older child clinging to one hand had started across the street. From the two cars flying toward them she shrank back, straight in the path of Blades' roadster. He swerved——

Civilization, with George Blades, had begun at the bottom and never gone more than halfway. His conscious mind, his cool, detached will, would in this critical moment have run ruthlessly over anybody who got in his path. But his muscles had been disciplined in the laws of a society which holds that you must try to miss pedestrians, particularly women and children. And his civilized muscles acted before his predatory brain could check them. He swerved; one wheel struck the projecting faucet of the fire plug on the corner; and he was pitched out, head foremost, over the mud guard, to strike the front wheel of the nearer of the two cars driving past him. He went down; the wheel passed over him.

Ruth, almost breathless, came in sight of the jail. There was a light in the second story of the sheriff's house, to which the jail was a sort of annex; and she wouldn't admit that it might have been left burning by somebody who had already fled. She ran up to the door, flung it open, ran upstairs.

The sheriff's wife, a huge square-faced woman, met her in the upper hall, a half-filled suit case in her arms.

"Dear, dear, dear, dear," she was muttering. "What——"

"Are the prisoners out?" Ruth asked.

"There ain't but one in there."

"Well, is he out?"

"Who'd let him out? Sim's gone to the movies. Dear, dear, he might be drowned. He wouldn't've run off an' left me——"

"Your prisoner can't run off," said Ruth. "He'll drown. Go down and unlock the door."

The square face gaped at her.

"My merciful, I never thought of that. Let him out, woman? I can't let him out."

"I'll be responsible for him if we aren't all drowned."

"Sim's got the keys with him."

"You've got two sets of keys," said Ruth. "I know it. You showed some of us from high school through the jail when your husband was away. Let him out."

"I dassent."

"Where are those keys?"

The Hollis voice of command was rising from the lower depths of heredity to-night. The sheriff's wife trembled and stepped back.

"I dassent——"

Ruth's strong fingers were at her throat; Ruth's arm, hardened by long practice with the broom and the scrubbing brush, was around her shoulders and gripping her tight.

"Give me the keys," she insisted in a voice that was inflexibly hard. "I'll choke you if you don't."

The rolling eyes of the sheriff's wife turned toward a desk by the banister. Ruth dragged her to it, released a hand to pull open the drawer. Half a dozen keys, on a ring.

"Which one?" she demanded.

The sheriff's wife, her throat released from that iron clutch, gasped and vainly tried to speak. Her hand fell on one, then another. Ruth let her go and ran downstairs. A steel door yielded to the first key; she was in a stone-walled corridor. Around the corner, lit by a single bulb, and she could dimly see Rexford peering through the barred door. Stumbling, she ran to him; his cry of astonishment was silenced as their lips met between the bars.

Then she tried to fit the key into the lock. It didn't work. Another; then another. At last it gave.

"What's the excitement?" said Rexford. "Did Hollisburg get the sanitarium?"

As he spoke the lights failed all about them. The flood had reached the power house. Ruth turned the key, swung open the door, and, reaching blindly, stumbled into his arms.

"The dam's broken," she panted. "Come."

They felt their way out into the corridor, around the turn, and then out from its utter blackness into the gray dusk of a starlit night.

"The river's that way," said Ruth. "If we keep to the left maybe we can stay ahead of the water." So they picked their way in a stumbling trot, arm in arm, while she told him as much as she knew about the disaster.

"Where's your father?" he asked.

"I don't know. He'd gone to Pence's. I suppose they all got away, but——"

Rexford squeezed her hand.

"Well, we'll see if there's any sign of him downtown—as far as you can see anything in this darkness. They must have some lights up on Main Street."

And they had—a few lanterns bobbing here and there, giving little light but much reassurance to a race grown unaccustomed to the dark. Main Street, Ruth noticed, was much quieter. The panic seemed to have been subdued. Perhaps the improvement was due to the fact that the water hadn't reached them. From the shouts exchanged between gropers in the darkness they learned that the flood had come only halfway down the block this side of Emery Street, and that was two blocks away. The worst seemed over—or had seemed over until a new and menacing complication of which they heard dim rumors as they made their way up Main Street.

Then Ruth squeezed his arm.

"Look, Bill! There's a light in the office."

A faint golden glow shone down from the second-story corner room in the Hollis Building. They crossed the street, thrust their way into the door past a group of men coming down, started up the stairway which somebody had lit with a candle.

"Who's this?" said a voice above them. "Can't get in here except on business. This is the emergency committee of safety."

"I'm Ruth Hollis. Do you know what's become of my father?"

"Right in, Miss Ruth." The sentinel flung open the door and the two found themselves blinking in the light from an oil lamp on the colonel's open desk, and three or four candles set on the mantelpiece. The colonel was at the desk, in the glory of frock coat and silk hat; and the room was full of men. The mayor was there, the sheriff; Jim Harby, Cal Truman, Clay Sellers, and three or four more.

"Here she is, colonel," cried Sellers. The colonel stood up; and Ruth gazed at him in astonishment. His manner was new to her.

"Why, child, why didn't you go home—up on the hill?"

"I had to get Bill out. They'd have let him drown."

The colonel's eyes swept around to the sheriff; and that official, in the act of rising to claim his prisoner, sat down again.

"A trifle thoughtless of you, Sim, wasn't it? Well, I suppose we must legalize this jail delivery. Squire, give this boy the hearing you denied him yesterday, and make it quick. We haven't time to waste."

Justice of the Peace Holliday came forward from an obscure corner.

"As counsel for the defendant," said Sellers, "I waive a hearing and consent to wait for the grand jury—if you'll parole him in my custody."

"Do as he says, squire," the colonel commanded. "Sellers will be responsible for him. Or, if you prefer, I'll be responsible for him. All right. Now we'll get back to work. Ruth, I want you to answer the telephone. Refer complaints of looting or disorder to the mayor; reports of marooned families to the sheriff; calls for medical aid to Jim Harby. Anything of special urgency to me. Now, Rexford, can you pull an oar?"

Rexford nodded.

"All right. Report to Dan Cullen at the bottom of the stairs. You'll fill out his squad. The reservoir's pretty well drained but the wreck of a barn has jammed up against the railroad bridge and the water's backing up again. Cal, have you phoned the harness store for the dynamite?"

"Yes, sir. They'll have it ready when Dan comes."

"Good. Now about commandeering all the lanterns——"

Rexford had time to exchange only a single glance with Ruth, already at the telephone, before he turned toward the stairs. And Clay Sellers chuckled as he passed:

"Row like a lion, brother. And be your oriflamme this night the plug hat of Hollis."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

B. F. Crisler never wasted either time or money. When he had a chance to sleep he took it; for in his business there frequently were occasions when sleep had to give place to other things. He had an appointment with the governor for ten o'clock Friday morning; so he slept till half past nine, breakfasted hastily on rolls and coffee, and on the way to his taxicab stopped at the hotel news stand only long enough to pick off a morning paper and thrust it into his pocket, to be read at a time of more leisure.

He was shown promptly into the governor's office, to find that statesman in conference with another person.

"Mr. Crisler? Delighted to see you. Shake hands with Adjutant General Simms."

"How do you do, general? If I'm intruding on affairs of state——"

"Oh, nothing confidential," said the governor. "We're just waiting for reports from Hollisburg."

"Hollisburg?" Crisler repeated, wondering if something had been put over in his absence.

"Yes. Why, of course—I'd forgotten. Your business was with Hollis County, too, wasn't it? Well, I suppose after what's happened it isn't quite so urgent, is it?"

"After what's happened? I don't follow you, governor."

"Haven't you read the paper?"

Crisler took it out of his pocket and read:

### HUNDREDS MISSING IN FLOOD-SWEPT HOLLISBURG AS DAM IS BLOWN UP.

#### Vengeful Hobos Believed Responsible For Outrage that Devastates Willow Valley.

#### PANIC FOLLOWS—STARVATION LOOMS.

"I plead guilty to being behind the times," he confessed. "If you'll excuse me, I'll catch up."

But he realized that he wasn't catching up very far; the last dispatch, telling of the successful dynamiting of a mass of wreckage caught on the railroad bridge, was dated a little after midnight. The flood was receding, but the extent of the damage was unknown. The news was scrappy, confused, often contradictory; but one paragraph caught his eye.

A pathetic incident of the disaster was the death in an automobile crash of George Blades, Main Street garage owner, who was soon to have been married. Upon learning of the blowing up of the dam Blades set out for his fiancée's home to help her to safety, but was upset in turning a corner. His partner, Rufus Wainstock, is missing.

Crisler took off his spectacles and wiped them thoughtfully.

"You're right, governor. My business isn't quite so urgent, now. Is this the latest news?"

The governor tossed a sheet of paper across the desk.

"There's a copy of a telegram I sent at nine o'clock to St. Elmo Pence. He's the big man down there. Duplicates to the mayor and the sheriff, to make sure. We ought to be getting an answer shortly; and then, general, we'll know what's needed."

Crisler read:

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA,
August 8, 1922.

St. Elmo Pence, Hollisburg, Indiana.

Distressed by news of disaster. All forces of State at disposal of Hollisburg. Wire at once what is needed. Battalion of National Guard can be entrained immediately if needed for preservation of order. Advise if declaration of martial law desirable. Red Cross and other relief agencies have food and medical supplies ready for shipment when railroad traffic is restored. Credits can be opened at once for further purchases if necessary. Tell us what is required and we are ready to supply it.

COLFAX WIMBOROUGH, Governor.

"I suppose my errand has only a historical interest now," said Crisler. "But just to clear things up, since you won't be likely to have much time for it after you've heard from Pence——"

"Better tell me about it now," said the governor, "for I think I'll have to go down to Hollisburg myself this afternoon. They'll need me, I suppose, to coördinate the relief and rescue work, sanitary and police measures, and so on."

From the outer office a boy came in with a telegram. The governor read it, showed it to the adjutant general with an impassive face, and then handed it over to Crisler.

HOLLISBURG, INDIANA,
August 8, 1922.

Hon. Colfax Wimborough, State House, Indianapolis:

As chairman Emergency Committee of Safety have received your telegram to St. Elmo Pence, who is physically incapacitated. Also to city and county authorities working under direction of this committee. Reports of disaster greatly exaggerated. Only known death due to incidental automobile accident. List of missing now reduced to nine, and hope that they may yet be heard from.

Fully appreciating your offer of assistance we are proud to say we need none. Emergency measures have insured food supply and distribution. Railroad service now fully resumed and interurban line will be clear this afternoon. Perfect order has been maintained. Material loss will be heavy, but local capital is prepared to assume the burden. I cannot praise too highly admirable spirit of recuperation shown by entire community. Hollisburg is itself again and will carry on. O. P. M. HOLLIS.

Nevertheless, his excellency went down to Hollisburg that afternoon. If everything was going well, all the more reason for the governor to appear and create the impression that he had done it; if he hurried he might even persuade Hollisburg that it was expectation of his arrival that had made the waters go down. Also, he had heard Crisler's story and he intended to suggest to the city and county officials that they had better give Crisler all the help he wanted. So Crisler went with him, among the horde of secretaries and attaches and newspaper men and press agents who crowded into the special car attached to the train which would reach Hollisburg at four-fifty-six. Remembering the cheering crowd that had greeted him when he came in alone, a week ago, he rather expected the entire population to turn out for the governor, if the flood permitted.

But by four-fifty-six the flood was long over. The bulk of the impounded waters had passed long before daylight and more actual damage had been done on the farms between Hollisburg and Adamsville than in the town itself. Pence's Addition was coated with mud, littered with driftwood; here and there a flimsy-built frame garage had been carried away; but most of the houses were still standing, even though their windows might have been broken by floating timber and their furniture wrecked or battered by the swiftly rising waters. As the train passed through the streets of the section flooded last night Crisler saw a hose attached to every fire plug; the mud was being washed off lawns and sidewalks and in some places the firemen already were flushing it out of houses where the water had left a coating of silt.

But the turnout at the station was small indeed. It consisted of Colonel Hollis, the mayor, the circuit judge and Clay Sellers; and while the first three greeted the governor, Sellers led Crisler aside.

"Well, Mr. Crisler, you missed a big night."

"So it seems. I suppose the town's almost ruined."

"Ruined?" Sellers asked, amazed. "Far from it. Not more than three or four missing now, and nobody that counts."

"I gathered that your spirit had been broken," Crisler explained. "The chamber of commerce didn't turn out to meet the governor——"

A slow smile spread over Sellers' face.

"For the first time since it was organized," he said, "the chamber of commerce is givin' its main attention to commerce—doin' it, not talkin' about it. Colonel Hollis has set the chamber to work. He's set us all to work. Everybody that was out of the flood area, practically, has been drafted to help the victims clean up. Work. Yes, sir. And what is most astounding of all, Mr. Crisler, he's set himself to work. He hasn't slept all night and all day and he's around drivin' us all like Simon Legree. Only he tells us, 'Boys, as soon as you've cleaned off the mud and carted away the rubbish, we'll all take a day off.'"

"That doesn't sound like Hollisburg as I knew it."

"It isn't Hollisburg as anybody's known it for twenty years. Friend Crisler, the reign of Pence is over. Last night settled that."

"Is he dead?"

"No, Doc Peebles holds out the cheering prospect that he'll probably have a couple more like that before they kill him. But they'll get him some day. And that ain't exactly a happy condition, knowin' just what is goin' to get you unless an automobile runs over you first. But that's only part of Pence's misfortunes.

"I'm looked on as eccentric, Friend Crisler, for my devotion to the ideas of classic antiquity. But the ancients had some sound ideas. One of 'em was that the worst of crimes was excess—having too much, being too much. If you became excessive something would get you.

"Well, Pence was too much; and he did one thing that killed him. That flood-insurance company. He had it figured to take money out of the poor suckers that bought in his Addition every way in the world; and then he piled that one on top of the rest—policies in a flood insurance company, when we all figured there'd be no more floods. And because he figured like all the rest of us, the assets of that company were considerable below what they should have been. Nearly every house in Pence's Addition will have to be all done over inside. Lots of furniture smashed up, hammered around against the wall, and so on. Automobiles carried off. Oh, the damage'll run up into hundreds of thousands; but ninety per cent of it covered by policies in Pence's company. And Pence done everything the law allowed, if not more. What's that? Reinsurance? No. Why should he take the trouble to do any reinsurance when there was never goin' to be another flood? I don't think there'll be any need for criminal prosecution, because Bob Mundy as secretary of the company applied for a receiver right off this morning and made it clear that they'd let the proper authorities settle things up. Looks as if the stockholders will have to make a pretty heavy contribution; and Pence holds ninety-eight per cent of the stock."

"You don't say so! Who's the receiver?"

"I am," said Sellers.

"Then," said Crisler, "I suppose we'll have no trouble getting our warrants. Huh! I'd forgotten we won't need one for Blades. How about his partner? The morning paper said he was missing. Did he turn up?"

"No, unfortunately, he didn't. The police are lookin' for him, though, all the way from here to St. Louis."

"Did you go ahead and get your warrants without waiting?"

"He's wanted," said Sellers cheerfully, "for assault on Herb Pence with intent to kill. When Herb come to this morning he told who hit him, so my client, young Mr. Rexford, is enjoying a clear reputation at last. Yes, sir, Rufe hit Herb, and there's a general alarm out; and since a farmer up the road claims he sees Rufe turnin' off the turnpike toward the dam, shortly before she was blown up, I expect if they ketch him they'll have quite an assortment of outrages to ask him about."

"Well!" said Crisler. "You haven't left much for me to do in Hollisburg. How about Raney?"

"Raney's locked up. I took the liberty of doin' that without waitin' for you, for fear he might depart for safer climes. Apparently that's just what he was goin' to do; but luckily his curiosity got the better of him and he come downtown this morning to take a look at the wreckage. So we nabbed him."

"Then I'll wire my men in Cincinnati to go ahead on that end, and that will clean us up. Anybody running Blades' garage?"

"The committee of safety has kind of got charge of it, provisionally. Young Mr. Rexford operatin' it under a mandate from Colonel Hollis, till we find the owner."

"To think of all the trouble we expected with Blades," Crisler snorted. "Well, we can lay out the evidence——"

Sellers shook his head.

"Mr. Crisler," he said, "is there any reason why—pending the arrest of our friend Rufe—we can't leave Blades out of it?"

"I suppose not, but why should we? Of course he's dead, but——"

"But the Pences are still alive. Leila Pence is no great tragic figure, just an ordinary girl like any other girl; but the man she was goin' to marry has been killed, and her home's two feet deep in mud, and her father's had a stroke and is liable to be set back several hundred thousand dollars. Do you see any use disturbin' the one thing she's got left, the confidence that George Blades was a high-minded business man who lost his life just before they were goin' to start in on a dream of happiness? I don't. Nor, provisionally, do I see any reason why we should hang this one thing more on Pence. He's done. He'll have to get out as president of the bank, and likely as presi-

dent of the chamber of commerce, too. He'll have plenty of money left but it'll take more than money to soothe the heart of St. Elmo Pence. And if you let the whole town know that the man he was goin' to take into his family and his real-estate business was nothing but a crook, why—I said some time ago that Pence was due for a visit from Nemesis. Well, he's got it. Justice has been done, good and hard. Now's the time for Christian charity. Mr. Crisler, don't rub it in."

"All right," Crisler promised. "Unless Rufe is caught and spills what he knows I'll let Blades' memory stay green. Now let's go down and talk to Raney."

"Wait a minute," said Sellers. "Take a look at this historic ceremony."

In front of half a dozen movie cameras, the governor was shaking hands with Colonel Hollis.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

As the colonel had said, Hollisburg was itself again. That was something of a hardship on the strong-handed persons who had taken hold on the night of the flood, and did their job so well that before the end of the week they had made themselves as superfluous as a field marshal after the war has been won. On Wednesday of the next week the committee of safety was formally disbanded; and at five o'clock the same afternoon Bill Rexford, under the committee's final order, closed the doors of Blades' garage. Pence owned the building; the used cars that Blades had had on hand had been returned to their owners; nothing was left of the property of Blades and Rufe but their books, now in the hands of the police; their good will, which had gone where the woodbine twineth; and a little office furniture, some oil and gasoline and tools, which were bought by the rival garage down the street. The purchase money was added to the bank account held for the missing Rufe, but with no great expectation that he would turn up to claim it.

Bill Rexford locked the door and sent a boy with the keys to Herb Pence; and then he went down the street to join Ruth, who was waiting for him at the library.

"And thus ends my brief career as an independent business man," he told her.

They came out from the reading room, with its warning signs of "No Talking," and stood on the steps in the afternoon sunlight.

"And you liked it," said Ruth. "The Pences will have to rent the building for somebody else to use as a garage. Why don't you try it?"

"My ambitions run a different way," Rexford told her. "I'd still like to buy that farm." He stopped, with a sudden worry in his face.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I was just thinking," he explained, "that it's been a week since I did any manual labor. Thursday I was in jail, Friday and Saturday I was doing odd jobs for the committee, and since then I've been running this garage."

"Don't be foolish. I've seen you working the gasoline pump yourself. And nobody would disqualify you for what you did during the flood."

"Nobody ought to, but I'm afraid of the law. I'd better telegraph grandfather's executor and tell him the truth. If he says I'm ineligible I suppose I'll have to try to borrow a little money here and start up that garage again. I could probably do it, now that I'm out of jail; after all, we Phi Chis seem to hang together—in Hollisburg. But I'd rather buy the farm. Where are we going? Or does it make any difference?"

"It does to me; I have to go home and get supper for father. So you'll have to come too."

"We'll just stop at the office and tell Sellers," he said. "I suppose I revert to my chauffeur job for the next few weeks, if I'm still in line for my twenty-five thousand. Carpenter's a good fellow—the executor. He'd give me the edge in the decision if it lay with him. I suppose the courts will have to settle it, but—oh, Ruth, we'd like that farm."

"We?" she asked, looking him somberly in the eyes.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"I told you last week," she said wearily. "Father did a wonderful thing here, of course. And I think they're going to elect him president of the chamber of commerce as soon as Mr. Pence resigns. But—it isn't a salaried job. And our mortgages are still going to fall due, and Mr. Pence is going to need the money, and we can't pay them."

"Now you don't mean to tell me you're going to be so unreasonably stubborn as not to let me look after that—if I can."

"I know father would never let you do it. And I'll have to stand by him."

"But," said Rexford, "on the night of the flood, when he and I were both in danger, you came to me. I know it's an old story that you'd be willing to die with people you wouldn't want to live with, but——"

"Now, Bill, I didn't mean it that way."

"I think," he told her, "that you've got yourself into a frame of mind about these mortgages. You had to brace yourself to meet the shock, and it's hard for you to unbrace, even if I'm here to be a shock absorber. But I won't argue with you on the sunny side of Main Street. If we have to hold a joint debate let's do it this evening while I'm helping you wipe the supper dishes."

"I won't let you," Ruth declared. "Wipe dishes, I mean."

"I submit to no dictation, woman, unless you're prepared to marry me."

She managed to smile at this, but they said no more till they came back to the office and found Sellers standing in the doorway, involved in clouds of pipe smoke.

"Boss," said Rexford, "I come back to your employ to-morrow. But I'm going out for supper, on the assumption that you haven't any philosophical thoughts you want to confide in me."

"And if I had you'd be goin' out just the same, wouldn't you? Hollisburg's been too lively of late for philosophy to get much of a toe hold, but I expect we'll have some opportunity to debate matters from now on. However, I wouldn't stand between you and your social engagements. Only there's a couple of letters here for you."

"Letters?" Rexford ran in and snatched them off the desk. For his letter to Marian Selden had been the first notice of his whereabouts which any of his old friends had had since he left New York. And if there were two letters for him, she must have spread the news.

One of them bore the address of Henry F. Carpenter. That was business—Rexford's business. Perhaps Carpenter had heard of his activities, somehow—news of the Hollisburg flood must have got into the New York papers; perhaps he had already lost his legacy. But the other letter was addressed in Marian's handwriting. And since that might contain news that would interest Ruth, he opened it first.

DEAR BILL: And after we all thought you'd jumped off the earth or cut your throat or something, wasn't it just like you to turn up again? Office boy! What kind of an office boy are you, I'd like to know? Your letter chased me up to Lenox and back again, and then when it finally arrived I had to see Mr. Carpenter and make sure I wasn't wrong before I wrote you.

Bill, you wonderful sublime idiot, where have you been keeping yourself? Don't you know Carpenter's been hunting all over the country for you ever since you disappeared? And why on earth were you so sudden about it? Don't you know that three days after you dropped off into the underworld or the hereafter or wherever you went that they found your grandfather's real last will and testament, made down at Aiken last winter in a fit of grandfatherly affection? I think it's a perfect scream if you've been office-boying a year to get your twenty-five thousand when he split the residuary estate between you and the theological seminary——

Rexford read on to the finish—then read Carpenter's letter, which only confirmed the other.

"Ruth!" he called shakily. "Ruth!"

From the threshold, where she had been waiting silently with Sellers, she came into the office, so dim in the afternoon shadow that she didn't notice his excitement.

"Ruth," he demanded, "I want to know the truth. Don't you want me to look after those mortgages because you think your father would rather lose everything than let somebody else pay them, or because you think it would leave me broke? On his account or mine? Which is it?"

"I suppose it's both, probably. Mixed up, like everything. But, Bill, I simply won't hang my troubles around your neck and weight you down."

"You certainly won't," he agreed. "Ruth, dear, it appears that I jumped at conclusions when I went out on the road. We're going to be worth a million or so—oh, yes, it's true. I'm sorry if it takes your breath away, but it was a shock to me too. So your mortgages—why, I can pay them off out of the income I haven't collected in my year on the road."

"A million!" Ruth repeated, dazed.

"Now don't say you're afraid of a million. If you'd married Herb——"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of it, or you. But—I'd been building air castles on the old Miller place——"

"Why not?" he said cheerfully. "I never heard that it hurt a farmer to have a million behind him. If it suits you, there's nothing I'd like better than to settle down on the Miller place—with winters in New York."

"I've always wanted to see New York," said Ruth.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

In an office building on La Salle Street the vice president of the Associated Health Hotels Corporation was receiving his old friend B. F. Crisler.

"Well, Jim," said the investigator, "when I came around here to get some local color about sanitariums, before I went down to Hollisburg, I didn't dream how much I'd need it. They pushed me so hard before I had occasion to let 'em know about my real business that I came pretty near having to start one of the darned things to keep them quiet. Did you ever get a bottle of their terrible mineral water that I sent you? I had to do it—had to be seen doing it by the president of the chamber of commerce. Sorry to have bothered you with it."

"I got it," the vice president told him. "Got it and had it analyzed. Also got some opinions on it from our medical board. Frank, do you mean to tell me they simply let that stuff run away down at Hollisburg? That they don't even charge money for drinking it?"

"Why? Is it any good?"

"Well," said Jim, "if our technical men know their business—and we wouldn't have declared an eighteen-per-cent dividend last year if they didn't—that Hollisburg water is as good as French Lick. And their rail connections are good, the lay of the land is attractive so far as I could judge from the geographies and road maps——"

Crisler grinned.

"I can tell you a lot about that, too. I suppose I've still got a lot of figures in my trunk that I got from the chamber of commerce about mean temperatures and altitudes, and drainage and taxation."

"Then you'd better let me see them," Jim advised, "for it certainly looks to me like a good prospect. Town owns this well, you say? Why on earth have they never cashed in on it?"

Crisler shook his head.

"I guess the gentleman who did most of the cashing in down in Hollisburg didn't see enough in it for him. But he's through, now."

"I suppose the town was pretty well ruined by the flood, wasn't it?"

"Man named Pence was pretty well ruined but most other people were protected by their insurance policies. There's about as much money in Hollisburg as there ever was, I guess, though it's distributed a little more evenly. Why?"

"We operate each sanitarium through a local corporation," Jim explained. "Try to get a minority interest of local capital, when we can. We've found it's very useful in questions of taxation and relations with the local authorities. Very useful. I gather that this man Pence would have been ideal for president of the company, if we started up at Hollisburg; but I suppose he's down and out now."

"His prestige is pretty well demolished," Crisler agreed, "and his nerve, too, I guess. But if you need a local man to head your organization, what's the matter with Colonel Hollis?"

"The fellow that took hold at the time of the flood? I've read a lot about him. But could we get him? I got the idea that he was too much occupied."

"I think maybe we could persuade him," said Crisler. "If you like I'll write to my lawyer down there and get him to put out some feelers. Only, Jim, I've got to have your solemn oath that you really mean business. I've fooled that town once about a sanitarium and if I do it again they'll send a delegation up here to lynch me."

"Of course we mean business. It's a crime to let that water go back into the ground and waste its sweetness on the desert air, when you could charge people real money for drinking it."

"It is good water," Crisler admitted, "when you get over the smell. I brought a keg of it back with me. Take a glass every night. I find it has an excellent effect on the liver."

Colonel Hollis stared across the desk at Sellers.

"Do I understand you rightly?" he demanded. "This is a real sanitarium this time? No more deception?"

"It seems to be perfectly authentic," said Sellers. "These people operate a string of fourteen of the things already, and it seems they make money."

"And," the colonel went on after some clearing of the throat, "did I understand you to say they offer me five thousand dollars a year as president of the company they propose to organize in Hollisburg?"

"That's what they say."

"Well, well. Well, well. Mr. Sellers, a moment that I have often foreseen has arrived—when the demands of commerce, of progress, if you will, would knock loudly at my door, interfering with the historical labors to which I have devoted my later years. I am confronted, sir, with the necessity of making a very difficult decision. I already have considerable responsibilities as president of the chamber of commerce. They make inroads on my time. In fact, sir, I haven't taken up my pen to continue the history of Hollis County since the night of the flood."

"I reckon you'd have time to do some writing even if you took this job."

"Not if I took it seriously, sir. And I should take it seriously. It isn't in me to be a mere figurehead. And especially, if I may say so, since mistaken ideals of commercial ethics made such progress in this town in recent years. I'd have to give close attention to my duties for fear other people might slide back into some of the practices of the late Mr. Pence. Yes, sir, a very serious decision. If I accept this offer it means postponing the completion of my history for years and years—perhaps forever."

"Well, of course, colonel, it's up to you."

"And it isn't a question of money," the colonel resumed rather vigorously. "My daughter wanted me to come live with her at her country place, after she's married. But I said to her, 'No, Ruth. You young people will be spending the winter in New York while your house is being remodeled, and when you come back in the spring you'll want to enjoy your home by yourselves. Leave me in the old mansion on the hill.'

"I sold those lots on Whitcomb Avenue at a pretty good price and I guess even after the dam is rebuilt hill property will be worth more than it was before the catastrophe. The old mansion isn't modern, of course; but it represents a considerable value. You might say it's the last jewel left to the family; and if I've pawned it I've done so with the certainty of being able to redeem it eventually.

"Yes, sir. My prospective son-in-law, Mr. Rexford, is going to take up those mortgages Pence held and advance me a little more money on the house against the prospective royalties of my history. There's no doubt it will sell well—look at that book of Henry Adams'. And pending publication I can afford to incur some further obligations, perhaps——

"You wonder, Sellers, why I'm so free with this information about my private finances. Because, sir, I'm going to accept this offer; and I want you to understand perfectly well that money has nothing to do with it. No, sir, I'm probably making a considerable monetary sacrifice in postponing the completion of my history. But the truth is, Sellers, I've been a little restless since the committee of safety was dissolved. Found it impossible to settle down to writing. All my life I'd supposed that I wasn't a man of action; but we had so infernally much action forced on us that night that had to be done that I got in the habit. Yes, sir. It was pretty hard work; but, damn it, Mr. Sellers, the truth is that I find I like work. I'd feel lonesome without it."

"Then I'll wire Chicago that it's all settled," said Sellers. "But, colonel, you're blame lucky you acquired this affection for work late in life. If you'd got started earlier it might have become a habit. And there ain't so much fun in it when the novelty wears off."

*The complete novel in the next issue is "The Valley of the Four Ghosts," a Western story by William West Winter.*

## A GREAT FAMILY

HERBERT HOOVER had been greatly annoyed by a foppish young job seeker named Potter who bragged about his ancestry. "I wonder," said Mr. Hoover urbanely, "if you're related to the Potter family of which the eminent New York bishop was a member." Of course, he was, declared the fop. "I was sure of it," said Hoover. "You know, it was at a reunion of this family some years ago that one of them said he often felt like exclaiming: 'Oh, Lord, thou art the clay and we are the Potters!'"

# The Iron Fist

By W. O. McGeehan

*Author of "Champion of Champions," and other stories.*

**W. O. McGeehan is one of America's foremost sporting writers. His stories of big ring battles are reckoned among the classics of the sport pages. To the broader field of fiction he has brought the gift of colorful and vivid description and of spirited narrative that helped make him a top-liner among the news writers; and this gift added to his ability as a story teller has enabled him to produce in "The Iron Fist" a really great tale of the prize ring.—THE EDITOR.**

JACK CASE was sitting under a pine tree in the Ozarks looking dreamily down on the streets of The Springs. His expression was grave as he contemplated the inevitable consequences of liquor, women, chance and battle, the four lines that encompassed the square of his existence.

Through the dusty main street crawled a somber gray motor vehicle used as an ambulance for the incoming patients and later as a hearse to take some of them out. This time the gray motor was headed toward the station and was moving slowly.

"That was the late Mr. 'Scar-face' Butler," explained Jack Case. "I knew him well. He and the late Mr. 'Silent' Smith used to run a big gambling joint in Frisco. The late Mr. Smith died in an asylum about four years ago. It was very sad. The late Mr. Scar-face Butler had the locomotor very bad when he came here and he passed out yesterday. Look at this place—nothing but ghosts of the sporting life."

The atmosphere about the Valley of the Human Wrecks was becoming decidedly lugubrious. Even Mr. Case, who had seen everything he cared to see and many things he did not care to see at all, was becoming affected. He stared moodily downward and breathed heavily through his dilated nostrils. It seemed as though the balsamic odor of the pines had left. Mr. Case was sniffing odors entirely foreign to the locality, the smell of the resin of the ring, the aroma of brandy, the scent of musk, the acrid vapor of powder and last of all the moldy smell of the cemetery.

Mr. Case had fallen into a reverie from which he must be roused abruptly. "Jack," I demanded suddenly, "did or did not Jack Dempsey use the iron bandages at Toledo?"

Jack Case brushed the iron-gray hair out of his eyes and at the same time brushed aside his tragic mood. He peered at my hands, for through ring habit Mr. Case never looks friend or foe in the eye. The

fists always have concerned Mr. Case vitally. He could read thought and intent better by watching the hands than he could by attempting to read expressions. Mr. Case had learned early that the face could be made a screen for the mind.

"I don't know," said Mr. Case. "It might have been. In my career I used them only once and that was a personal matter."

Then Mr. Case made a full and voluntary confession under the pines above the Valley of the Human Wrecks.

It starts with Chatham Square, New York, and Rose McGann. She was a mixture that was bound to make trouble, Irish father and Italian mother, and Chatham Square and battle for her environment, as you might say. You have read of Chatham Square of the old days and the half of what you read was made up of lies.

I cannot say that Rose McGann made me any trouble for myself excepting maybe she did lure me on a little. That was nothing to squeal about because I had learned to laugh at myself very early in life. That helps a whole lot in playing any game—to be able to laugh at yourself. I do not mean to laugh outwardly, but to laugh inwardly and quietly.

You never heard of Jimmy Thomas because he is not even in the record books and all because of Rose McGann and those cruel black eyes and the lying red lips. It might sound silly to say it but I always thought that he would have been a greater middleweight than the late Stanley Ketchel, and I've been in Ketchel's corner, as you know.

Myself, I was a fair lightweight then but a champion must have two hands. I had only a left—a good left—but one hand is not enough. Oh, yes, I was close to it once or twice but without a right hand the best I can say for myself is that I was a good pork-and-beaner. Why should I try to bluff myself? I had brains enough to know just how far I could go. There was no telling how far Jimmy Thomas might have gone.

He had everything and especially he had two hands and he could shift as quickly as Ketchel ever could. And when Rose McGann saw Jimmy Thomas she looked at me very seldom. I could not interfere for it would have looked as though I was jealous of my pal if I had said a word. That might have been true too, for Rose McGann was Rose McGann.

He came up fast in the business, did Jimmy Thomas. In nineteen fights he scored eighteen knock-outs, some of them with the right and some of them with the left, and I was so busy in his corner that I could get no bouts for myself. He was to have married Rose McGann. I had my misgivings but marrying is a man's own personal business and never try to tell him that it is not.

Then the greaser came and he was not a bad-looking brute either. Rose McGann danced with him at the outing of the James P. Higgins Association and that was the start of the match. Jimmy Thomas was jealous. I knew that he would be jealous all his life and in half a hell for good if he married Rose McGann. I say this though she could have smiled me to the devil with my eyes wide open even then.

The greaser was a bit overweight for the middle division, which was a hundred and fifty-eight ringside at the time, but Jimmy wanted this match and his manager figured that it would be a set-up anyhow. He said that the more fights Jimmy had under his belt the sooner he would be ready for the crack at the title.

Jimmy was raging in his corner that night, which was not like him; for when he was out for business he was as cool as a bank president plotting to foreclose on some widows and orphans. I stayed close to the corner trying to calm him because in the fight game you never can tell and above all you must not figure that anybody is a sucker. This is how all the champions lose. They figure that the contender must be easy and they never realize that they have made a mistake until the count is finished. The Germans figured that the Allies were suckers and now look at them.

It happened in the first rush. I don't think it was more than three seconds after the gong that my pal dropped like a sack of junk and nobody seemed to know how it happened. All that I could see was that it was a wild right swing. When I picked him up there was a round bruise on the left side of the jaw. The bone was broken and so was the heart of Jimmy Thomas.

The greaser was gone before I could figure it out. It was the "Iron Mike" that did the work. What is the "Iron Mike?" It is a guerrilla invention. It is a piece of metal

like a bolt with a double head. You hold it so that the heads just jut out of the closed fist and when you hook or swing it cuts and crunches. With the help of "Iron Mike" even I could come back.

"What was it?" Jimmy asked me. I told him. He was very white and broken all over.

"I thought so," he said. "But what's the use? Alibis won't go with the fight fans and they won't go with Rose McGann. I'm through."

The last I saw of Rose McGann was as she flitted through the crowd at the ringside. And she was laughing. I never forgot that laugh and I never will. She went with the greaser to South America, they said in Chatham Square. Jimmy Thomas started to drown his troubles and he finished by drowning himself. He jumped from Brooklyn Bridge into the floating ice. No, not like Steve Brodie. But we'll let all that lay.

It was after the bout with the "Walloping Wildman" that I got what you call the wanderlust. I was absent-minded that night and I forgot to duck one. The swing landed full on my nose and it altered my personal appearance considerably and hardly for the better. Being a sensitive man I decided to move as far as possible from Chatham Square and the memory of Rose McGann.

Then I became a sort of missionary, roving from one country to another teaching the rudiments of the manly art to the benighted inhabitants of the various places. This big lummox, Luis Firpo, is one of the consequences of my traveling, for it was none other than your humble servant, Mr. Jack Case, who first gave the South Americans the idea of using the four-ounce glove instead of the three-pound knife. I still hold the title as champion at all weights in South America.

We headed that way by easy jumps from Bombay to Capetown and then to Ecuador. The other member of my troup was the late Mr. Robert Hammersly. He was an English remittance man and might have made a fair heavyweight if he could have learned to think on his feet. He had only three weaknesses, women, easy money and the cards. Otherwise he was a man of sterling character when he had a good influence like myself behind him.

The remittances used to come quarterly and last considerably less than that. Twice we had to sweeten the income by peremptory cable. We tried it first in Bombay where we were in a jam on account of a lady in Robert's set. The cable we sent read, "Robert killed coolie. Serious trouble. Send money." It brought us a thousand American money. Once again we had to send this homicidal news from Capetown with the same happy ending. It was on account of another of Robert's lady friends that we had to leave Capetown.

The reason I picked Ecuador was because of something a drifter told me about the natives being interested in the noble art of boxing on account of having a champion of their own. The idea back of my head was to enter into some business arrangement with this proud South American gladiator and make a stake, win, lose or draw. I had about completed my mission of inspiring the Old World with a love for the art of the late Marquis of Queensberry and I wanted to come back to Chatham Square with a roll.

The consequence was that Robert and I landed in Ecuador with a couple of white suits and about forty dollars in mixed money. Robert was for killing another coolie on the spot but, remembering the goose that laid the golden eggs and her untimely fate I restrained his murderous and greedy impulses. Then we had another slight argument as to which consul we would call on first. I being an American citizen with an important and philanthropic mission insisted it must be the American consulate.

The American consul was sitting at a table with a glass in his hand and his elbow crooked comfortably. Across the table was a Spanish person snoring peacefully but loudly with his head on his arms. I made myself known and introduced Robert, which was the signal for a fresh bottle and the exchange of the usual courtesies.

"I'm from Troy, New York, myself," said the consul and he told me that his name was O'Hara. "I saw you fight once and the rest I know by reputation. The general here will sleep for another hour. These people are all chippy drinkers—can't carry anything. What manner of larceny are you up to in this desolate and dissolute country?"

I felt a little hurt at the mention of such a word so I told him about my mission and my ambition to knock this South American gentleman loose from his shoes in order that

I might bring back the championship of South America to Chatham Square. By this time the liquor was circulating and the consul grabbed my hand and led in the first verse of "The Star-spangled Banner" which is as far as any true American can go. Robert wanted to sing "God Save the Queen," but a look from me warned him that it was a faux pas.

Then Mr. O'Hara gavè me the dirt, as you might say. The name of the local champ was Don Diego Gonzales and he was a bit heavier than a middleweight. The custom of this barbarous country was to have the visiting boxer take a dive and eighty per cent of the net. Don Diego kept the title and what he could make on the betting which was no little. It was a close corporation and much business was transacted along these lines. It had the old fight trust of Frisco lashed to the mast and there were some bright business men in that one.

"Are you at present a business man or a fighter?" demanded Mr. O'Hara after he had functioned as a consul and explained the lay of the land to his countryman.

"That remains to be seen," I told him. "But whatever happens, Mr. O'Hara, you shall know in advance in both your official and private capacity. So we sang "Auld Lang Syne" and it woke up the general.

When this military person was told that I was a world-famous box fighter he embraced me as though I was a long-lost son and the consul detailed him as our escort to the headquarters of the local gladiator. This Don Diego certainly had one of the most attractive gilded palaces of sin that I ever saw. There are places in Tokyo, and Bombay is not so bad—but we'll let all that lay.

The general hammered on the bar with the hilt of his sword and demanded that the bartender produce Don Diego and plenty of champagne. Don Diego came from a side room and Don Diego turned out to be the greaser. At that moment I thanked the Walloping Wildman for disguising me permanently with a simple punch in the nose. The greaser did not recognize me at all.

"What is the name?" he asked, for he could speak English, as well I knew.

"In India and South Africa they call me the 'Iron Man,'" I said. "That's good enough. We're both business men, I take it."

He looked all the more interested and winked. "That's good," he said. "Señor el Hombre del Fierro—that is what they call the Iron Man in Spanish. Come into my office, Iron Man, and talk business."

It certainly paid to be champion of one of those South American countries, if one happened to be a native. The greaser was leading the life of Riley. I don't know what a broker's office looks like because I have only been involved in the most honorable forms of larceny but no broker's office could have been better furnished than this one.

He gave me a good cigar and we started to map out the plan of campaign. I did most of the listening. He started with an insult.

"I could knock you out anyhow," he said. "But there is always a lot of betting on the rounds here and I want to make sure because all of mine comes from the betting. You get eighty per cent of what comes into the can and the officials get the rest. The house ought to be twelve thousand pesos easy. How does that suit you?"

I was thinking very rapidly. I was not thinking of money, either. I was thinking of how my pal looked when I found him in the East River.

"It sounds reasonable," I said. "But seeing that I am a stranger to your fair shores I think that we ought to get together and rehearse the thing so that it will look as nice as possible. Win or lose it never has been said that I have been a party to any bald fakes. Also if it looks too bad some of your countrymen may get nervous with their knives."

He laughed. "That's not a bad idea," he said. "It is a pleasure to deal with a real business man."

So I got polite too. "The pleasure is all mine," I said.

A voice from behind a pair of brocaded curtains almost made me jump out of my chair. It was the voice of Rose McGann, speaking in Spanish. She pushed back the curtains and stood between them. I have hinted that she was good looking when she was a slip of a thing in Chatham Square. She was full blown then and what a woman she was in that Spanish costume with the diamonds in her ears and around her neck and in the big comb. I never saw anything on the stage that would make a man look as long as that picture of Rose McGann.

The sight of her hit me like a right to the jaw. I never was that rattled in the ring. Women remember better than men and I was afraid that she might recognize me so I looked at her only out of the corner of my eye. I was afraid of that woman and I would be afraid if I were to see her now.

The greaser answered her in Spanish, pleading as though he were asking her a favor instead of telling her to get out, and she dropped the curtains and was gone. I was still in a daze when he started to hand me over some money. "You must need something for training," he said. "And this binds the bargain."

When I got back to the bar Robert was sitting at a table with not such a bad-looking spiggotty girl. "This is Dolores," said Robert. "And she wants a new comb with pink beads in it. Say, Jack, can't I kill another coolie?" So I handed him over a hundred pesos and resisting all the enticing looks that the other girls gave me when I showed the roll I told Robert to report at the consulate in an hour.

I had to talk to somebody and O'Hara seemed like a man of feeling and understanding. I told him the whole story while we were consuming a few steaks with peppers and onions after the style of the country, with the Three Stars at our elbows to make the conversation more sincere.

"The question is, can you take him, Jack?" said the consul.

"That remains to be seen," I said, "as 'Kid' McCoy said to the fellow when he gave him a cauliflower ear. I'll find out to-night when we have that rehearsal in the greaser's patio."

"But you will be giving away twenty pounds," said O'Hara.

"Always remember that I want to win this fight more than I ever wanted to win one," I said. "For sentimental reasons I want to bring the championship of South America to Chatham Square and I am a very sentimental man."

We went out to the veranda where it was a little cooler and we looked up at one of those volcanoes with which the country was infested. There was a sullen red glow around the top of it and now and then it would spit out bits of living fire. I don't know why it reminded me of Rose McGann.

"There ought to be another earthquake pretty soon," said O'Hara cheerfully. "I can tell by the way old Monte Diablo is spitting to-night. This is a gay life. If it isn't an earthquake it's a revolution. I can't say that life in this bright little republic is at all monotonous. Often I long for the seclusion of Forty-second and Broadway and the quiet of Park Row during the rush hour."

There was a sound of guitars and mandolins along the *calle* and it came right up the stairs. It was Robert and he had brought the orchestra from the greaser's along with him. Robert always was eccentric. He liked parades and things. When we were inspecting the geisha quarter at Tokyo he had himself followed by a stringed orchestra, samisens and things like that.

"It's a lovely song about a swallow that is far from its home and never expects to see home again," explained Robert. Then he broke into tears and the consul sent the orchestra away with some very handy Spanish cussing and Robert went to sleep in the general's chair.

"I can't go with you," O'Hara said. "I'm a government official. The American government does not wish to be too inquisitive about the affairs of its citizens abroad provided they are willing to break clean and protect themselves in the clinches."

The greaser was waiting for me in the moonlight with a set of the big gloves. It was light enough, for the moon down by the equator is big and full and wonderful.

"We'll go easy," he said. "We can guess the time of rounds. Now!"

You remember the story about "Philadelphia Jack" O'Brien rehearsing a bout in a stable? This was queerer still. I could tell in just thirty seconds that he had nothing but the right that telegraphed itself. I could land on him whenever I wanted, but he was tough. I could tell from only tapping at his jaw that it would take more than I had then to bring him down. But he could not lay a glove on me if I did not let him. He was well winded when we called time for the first one.

We waltzed into the fourth act, both of us wringing wet with sweat and the greaser panting like a tired hound, "Now," I told him. "In this round I rub my nose with my left. Right after that you feint and cross with the right. This is where I forget to duck. Only pull the punch."

He tried it but he was clumsy, so clumsy that it would not do even for South America. To-day at the Garden or in Jersey they

can get away with raw ones. But the art has deteriorated terribly. We erred again and he went better. I let on that the punch stung more than it did.

I pretended to be anxious about the money that I never hoped to collect. "That will be all right," he said. "I'm on the level with everybody I do business with. My wife and the general will have your bit ready and pass it to your manager as soon as the bout is over. You can trust me."

It was a good thing that the moon was not any brighter or he might have read what was in my face. When sure-thing gamblers and politicians talk about being on the level I cannot keep the poker expression which is so necessary in my business.

"I can do it," I told the consul.

"Then grab the title and take it back to Chatham Square with my love," he said and he began to hum "The Sidewalks of New York." The volcano glowed redder and redder. The air grew stiller and more oppressive. Oh, for the breeze off Coney Island, the howl of the barker and Moe and Izzy squawking in Yiddish—and home again.

I bundled Robert out with me and when I slept I dreamed of my late pal that was gone and of Rose McGann sitting on the red rim of the volcano laughing that savage laugh while the fire burned around her. Then an elevated train seemed to rumble by and I woke.

There were three weeks to get ready and I wanted to make the most of them. I had a heart-to-heart talk with Robert and I convinced him that it was necessary to work and that he would have to work with me. In the morning we would take the usual turn about the roads. Not too much of that because it was a sidehill country almost exclusively. In the afternoon we worked with the big gloves.

The main work was down in the cellar in the cool of the evening. The sand bag is the best tool to develop the punch. Every night I worked there alone, sinking my left into the bag as hard as I could. Sometimes I would imagine that I could see the greaser in front of me and I would drive into the thing so hard that I was afraid of breaking the hand. A left hook or maybe a couple of left hooks driven hard and fast enough would do it.

Robert was just about the build of the greaser, only a bit trimmer and I practiced that left hook to his jaw. Once I shot it over so quickly that the boy went out for more than the count. But Robert was a game youngster. All he had to say when he came to was: "I say, Jack, you're a jolly old Jem Mace."

The posters around the town were highly flattering. I was the "Hombre del Fierro," the "Iron Man," and the great English box fighter from Bombay. The inhabitants certainly were all smoked up over the thing. I cannot remember names very well because I learned my geography by going to places and looking them over, not from the works of Rand & McNally. I think the name of the place was Quito and we will let it go at that. It was mostly on the side of a mountain and I am not going back for reasons which will be made logical later.

We picked up just one more hombre for the training camp, a little American colored man. I called him George because he was a ringer for the late George Dixon, "Little Chocolate," the grandest little boy of his inches that ever lived, color line or no color line. I used George for speed and Robert for something to shoot at and I tell you that I got myself into fair shape by the end of a couple of weeks.

There was never a doubt in my mind that I could do what I had set out to do. You know that it is a belief of mine that a fighter can tell in advance when he is going to win and when he is going to lose. I could, or at least I thought I could. It was not superstition. It was instinct.

O'Hara dropped over to the camp the night before the bout. It seems that the British consul had to leave in a hurry on some official business and O'Hara was a bit puffed up because he was acting as the representative of Great Britain as well as of the United States.

"Which means," he said, "that I am responsible for Robert as well as for the interests of yourself and George. It looks as though I had my hands full, especially as far as Robert is concerned."

He told me that he had two thousand pesos on the short end which was five to one and he hoped and trusted that everything would be all right and that I would emerge from the ring in a vertical position. "After that," he said, "I will drive you to the consulate so that you can escape the infuriated populace. Then you and Robert and George will take the good freighter *Jennie Dusenberg* for the States. I think

that you can make it, because the marksmanship of this country is very inaccurate."

I always sleep well before a bout, being a philosopher as you might say. Only two things can happen—you win or you lose and then you pass on to the next event. Most boxers are that way. They have to be. It's different from baseball. In a fight you can make only one error and that is to forget to duck one.

I woke up with cramps and a high fever. They come on you suddenly in the tropics. I was sicker than I have ever been before or since. Robert was hustling hot compresses and little George was trying to rub me straight for I was all bent up in the middle. They sent for O'Hara. He was a good sport, that boy.

"The fortunes of war, Jack," he said. "Adios to the two thousand. You won't get over that for a week. In the meantime you might as well shoot some of this into you."

He dripped some absinth for me and I took it. With a couple of them the pain stopped and somehow my head seemed clear as a bell. It is a treacherous and deceptive drink, that. First it seems to cool you, then it starts the blood pumping at a steady gait.

"I say, Jack," said Robert, "I'll substitute for you. I think I can beat the beggar myself."

O'Hara looked at Robert curiously. "I'll gamble on Robert," he said. "Why not?"

By this time the absinth had taken hold for fair. "This is my own personal business," I screamed. "There will be no substitute. Jack Case is himself again, although just a little wabbly on his pins."

Then I got another slight twinge and I slipped back on the pillow. I came up smiling and inspired.

"Robert," I said, "I know what is the matter with me. I have been drinking too much coffee. Go right out now and get me ten packages of tea. I am a tea addict from now on."

Of course they thought that I was boiling drunk. But Robert, who had been brought up to consider any strange notion quite plausible, went out on his errand. When he came back I opened a few packages and took out the lead foil. I folded some of it into strips about two inches wide. O'Hara looked, then smiled a little. What an understanding he had! He should have been ambassador to the Court of St. James'.

"The two thousand pesos goes as she lays," he said. But Jack, man, go easy on the absinth. It is a medicine and not a beverage. Adios. Bring home the bacon."

"To Chatham Square," I said. He went out whistling "The Sidewalks of New York."

Half of the quaint city of Quito is directly over the equator. The other half is in hell and that is the half where the arena was located. Robert had a carriage for me and we started in style. George was in gala costume for the event and was wearing a very antique derby that he had brought from the States with him. It was lucky for him that he was not wearing the usual yegg cap or he might have had his skull chipped.

Just as we got a few squares from the hotel some of the hostile friends of the greaser started to shout something about the "gringos." Something dented George's derby and rolled to my feet. I reached for it and it was an iron bolt, the kind they use in fastening plates to rails.

When I felt that thing and closed my left fist over it I knew that it was a gift from the skies. "Luck is with us," I said to Robert. But George was moaning over his broken hat. "It wasn't lucky for mah headpiece," he grunted.

The arena was in a natural bowl at the foot of Monte Diablo. If you ever saw the bull arena at Mexico City on a Sunday in the old days you might have some idea as to the kind of crowd we had. There was a sea of sombreros and black mantillas around the ring. The sky was blazing and the wooden seats were scorching in the heat. Toledo that Fourth of July was cool by comparison.

We went to the dressing room and Robert poured a few pails of water over me when I stripped. The water turned to steam and hissed from my hide. When it came to putting on the bandages I had the smoke watch the door to let nobody in. Robert wanted to wind them. He looked at me and laughed.

"I say, Jack, for generalship you beat the jolly old Duke of Wellington himself." Even when he pulled the left glove on for me I do not think that Robert knew I had palmed the iron bolt.

"Oh, yes, they were very trusting in Ecuador at the time. By the way, did you notice that Willard's seconds did not look very hard at the bandaging or the glove fitting

at Toledo? Always have somebody *feel* the bandages. This has been my custom ever since I have been associated with Mr. Kid McCoy.

The greaser and the general came in a minute later. "Is everything all right?" the greaser asked.

"Everything will be all right," I told him. Somehow I felt in my heart that it would be. He slipped out and went into the ring and the crowd began to shout, "Viva."

Physically I was weak and a bit shaky but I do not remember ever having been as serene in my mind before a fight in my life. I gave Robert his instructions very quietly. "Keep your eye on the watch," I said. "Just thirty seconds before the bell hammer on the ring with the bottle and howl so that I can hear you. I want plenty of time so that they can't give him a slow count. My legs wouldn't last two rounds."

Robert understood. We walked down through the arena. I did not expect much enthusiasm and I did not get any more than I expected. I squatted in the corner and took in things out of the corner of my eye. Above us old Monte Diablo was puffing up big clouds of smoke, like a Dutchman's pipe.

The rest of it was rather misty because the fever was cooking my brain and the heat was frying the soles of my feet through the leather. I remember the referee announcing me as "El Hombre del Fierro," the "Iron Man." I could see Rose McGann in a box behind the greaser's corner, smiling that smile of death and destruction. As I went back to my corner I could see O'Hara sitting quietly with a long cigarette in the corner of his mouth and I winked at him. I took a long tug at the top rope and tried to stretch my body when the bell rang.

The greaser came out quietly and deliberately and made a slow lunge with his left. I worked around him and ducked a right swing. The legs started to go weak and there was a blur before my eyes. I had to start at once. I hooked the left and the greaser's head went back. I could feel him sag. There was a two-inch gash over the right eye and the blood gushed out, blinding him.

Then I went wild and savage. I hooked the left again and blood spurted from his nose. Again and his lips were crushed. He was reeling, but he reeled over toward me.

"What do you mean?" he gasped as he held me.

"Business, you skunk," I said with my lips close to his ear. He tried to claw at my throat with his gloves. I jolted him in the body with the loaded fist and he let go. Then I walked round him pecking at the battered face. Everything was red; that face, the arena and the sky.

He spread his legs and tried to stick it out. Behind me I heard the crash of breaking glass and Robert shouting like a madman.

"Iron for iron and Jimmy Thomas," I yelled. Then I hooked the right to the jaw and he dropped on his face. I could feel the bone crunch as I gave him what he had given my pal. Weak and wabbly, I staggered to my own corner and leaning on the ropes watched the referee as he waved his arm with the count. The arena was full of madmen and madwomen.

I heard a shot somewhere and the greaser's body twisted up, then stiffened out again. There were more shots and I could hear the zing of the bullets. Now, I do not like shooting. You cannot duck a bullet. That is why there were so few prize fighters in the late war.

At the first shot George screamed, "Alabama, come and meet me." He ducked through the crowd. Everybody seemed to be shooting as I floundered out of the ring. The shooting stopped suddenly and the crowd began to scream, *"Tremblor."* Either the fever had me or the ground was giving under my feet and I was sick at the pit of my stomach. I grabbed a chair to steady myself. There was a roar as though the hot brassy sky had cracked. I looked up at the top of Monte Diablo and a mass of fire like the blast of a Pittsburgh furnace was shooting out of the crater. A hand touched my shoulder and the voice of O'Hara spoke.

"Steady, Jack," he said. "They are having all of the national sports at once—a revolution, an earthquake and a volcanic eruption. None of these things lasts long."

There was O'Hara puffing his cigarette as quietly as though the earth giving way beneath him and the skies cracking above him and murder on all sides of him were parts of the boresome routine of his consular duties. He made me ashamed of myself. So did Robert, who was just looking on with that wooden English face and saying, "I say, what a jolly go."

I could see a familiar flash of crimson as Rose McGann disappeared at one end of

the arena. The general was with her, one epaulette torn off in the mêlée. So was the bag and the money. We got to O'Hara's carriage and we exceeded all records on the way to the consulate.

In the consulate we found George waiting for us. He had been a black boy to start with but by this time he had turned octoroon at least, he was that pale. O'Hara had a couple of quarts of brandy out in a minute and we applied restoratives in copious quantities. I still had on the left glove. O'Hara hugged me when I drew it off and spilled the contents.

"No one can say that you have no sense of humor," he said. "The Iron Man! I should say that you were."

"But we're broke," I said. "That hell cat got away with the bag."

"She won't have it long," said the consul. "She and the general were on the wrong side of the revolution and they surely will be shot against a wall. When you lose the toss in a revolution that is how you finish."

"I say, Jack," said Robert, "I have an idea." He reached for a pad and scrawled the old distress signal. "Here, George," he said. "Take this to the cable office." I knew what was in it. It read, "Robert killed coolie. Serious trouble. Send money."

There was a commotion in the street and Rose McGann rushed in, pale and trembling.

"Jack Case," she said. "For God's sake get me out of here. Take me with you. I'm rich. You can have everything——"

I told you about the hold she always had on me. Even then I weakened when she touched me. But I thought of my dead pal and I stepped back and left her there. "No," I said, "it was you who killed my pal."

Robert was staring at her foolishly. "Oh, I say," he said. "We must do something, you know. We're white men and, damn it all, if you won't stand by, Jack, I will."

Outside there was a crowd baying like a pack of wolves. Rose McGann knew that they were howling for her and she tried all of her wiles on that young Englishman.

O'Hara spoke sharply and his voice was chilly. "This woman is a citizen of the country," he said. "We cannot interfere. She is an accessory to the murder of her husband. Robert Hammersly, as the queen's representative I forbid you to interfere."

She saw that the drama was finished and I must say that she took her curtain well. "So you're white men," she said. "You poor curs, I'll bluff my way through." She went out to face the pack and I heard that she did bluff her way through, but I never saw her again.

Robert was in something of a daze for a while. I was upset myself but that ice-cold O'Hara in a minute or two was demanding to know what it was that the governor of North Carolina said to the governor of South Carolina. It was good brandy and we washed away the memory of the battle of the ring and the elements and of Rose McGann in it.

At four o'clock in the morning the consul, with a glass in each hand, was toasting the president and the queen at the same time, being the representative of both. So O'Hara and I sang, "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" while Robert made the words "God Save the Queen" and the thing blended very harmoniously.

In the midst of the song in came George with a cable. Robert looked sick when he read it and passed it to me with no comment. Evidently somebody in Surrey had been reading up regarding the habitats of the coolies. The cable said, "Good. Kill another."

I thought that O'Hara would collapse from laughing, Robert looking so glum, myself quite serious and George lying on the floor and moaning, "Alabama, I ain't going to see you no more."

It was O'Hara who took us out to the freighter and put us aboard. Not a trace of a headache did he have. And before I climbed the Jacob's ladder he put money into my hands. "I can cash my bets later," he said, "Remember me to Chatham Square."

Next night we three refugees were squatted on the forecastle head of the *Jennie Dusenberg* listening to the wash of the sea as we headed north. I was thinking of the red mists we had come from, and Rose McGann's face laughed at me out of the witches' fire on the water.

"I say, Jack," said Robert suddenly. "When we get to New York don't you think I could kill another coolie?"

*Another story by Mr. McGeehan in an early issue.*

# One-Hundred-Per-Cent Coöperative

By Thomas McMorrow

*Author of "A Man of Principle," "Let Me Explain!" Etc.*

**In this real-estate deal a fair exchange was no robbery.**

A SOLITARY traveler paused where the white road breasted the hill, and looked down into the deserted village.

Bright and sultry sunshine filled the little valley in which the village lay. The June morning was perfectly still; it seemed to be holding its breath; the woods behind the little village were like painted woods. None of the dear familiar noises of people about their tasks came to the traveler; his sudden apparition caused no dog to bark a challenge. In the circumscribing country no cows lowed, no crows wheeled or cried above the wood lots. The suggestive sounds of his approach caused no hospitable garage keeper to appear under the sign in the village which said "Fill Up Here with TEXAHOMA, that Good Gas;" in the sun porch of the village inn no hotel keeper rubbed up a smile and hoped that this prospect would be seduced from the straight-and-narrow path by the blazoned offer of a "Dollar Chicken Dinner." In the hushed and brooding air the smoke from the traveler's pipe rose straight as a straw.

The solitary traveler lifted his blue eyes from the dormant inn, blew out a short hard blast of smoke, clapped his brier between his white teeth and started his flivver again. He chugged and rattled down into the deserted village. Now that he was in action again one could see that he was not the traveler to lean on broken arches and indulge in maudlin reveries when confronted by deserted houses.

"I'll bet this burg will stagger to its feet after I've given it the needle!" he murmured.

He halted his car before the deserted inn and hopped nimbly out; he was a tall and slim and red-headed young traveler, brisk and alert. Out of his car he dragged half a dozen signs—black-lettered on yellow—and proceeded to hang them about. He hung one on the inn and he hung one on the garage and he hung one on the deserted tailor shop; he brought hammer and nails and fastened his signs to trees, one at each end of the deserted street. When he was done he had dispelled much of the melancholy and romance of the village, but had given it hope. His signs said:

For Property in this Vicinity,
see
FELIX J. HOPPER, INC.,
West Seventy-second Street, N. Y. C.,
Country & Suburban Department.

He looked upon his work, solicitous to see that he had left no angle from which any traveler could gaze upon the deserted vil-

lage without being stared in the eye by one of these signs. He nodded his head happily, struck a match on his trousers, relit his pipe charged with cut plug and hopped nimbly back into his dusty little car. He chugged and rattled out of the deserted village. As he passed the corporate limits he waved an appreciation at a roadside sign which said:

The Village of TENEYCK
Thank You!
Call Again!

He vanished down the white road in a noisome cloud of blue smoke. Just as he passed the corporate limits of the deserted village the breeze stirred and woke the trees from their stupor; birds fluttered and sang, and the "Texahoma" and "Chicken Dinner" signs got to creaking. If the matter had rested there the change in the weather could have been considered an omen boding well for the village from the visit of the red-headed traveler; however, the breeze extended itself into an ill-tempered gale which affrighted the birds and blew the "Texahoma" sign from its hooks and put out the sun. It behaved in all ways so willfully as to make one think that it blew as it listed without consideration for the village of Teneyck or the red-headed traveler's visit, and to make one seriously question the right of weather reports to a place in literature. Let us then drop the weather in condemnatory silence and follow rather the flying realtor.

Eighteen minutes after leaving the deserted village he passed through White Plains, which is the seat of government for Westchester County. Westchester County bounds New York City on the north; it is convenient and removed. Many thousand New York business men commute from Westchester, but the county is high priced and aristocratic and is not to be confounded with "the suburbs" where New Yorkers dwell in exile for the sake of the children. People live in Westchester, and do not merely sleep there. The county is parklike, studded with country clubs and fine road houses, sleek with golf links, beautified. If a man live in Bergen County across the Hudson, in Richmond on Staten Island, in Queens or Nassau on Long Island, he is *prima facie* a respectable citizen and a householder, but his address alone is not determinative of his social quality. But if he yield to his wife's insinuations and move to Westchester—to Pelham, New Rochelle, Mamaroneck, Bronxville—ah, he has arrived!

With sustained approval the red-haired realtor watched the sumptuously appointed landscape flowing by.

Westchester County is in the United States—willingly, gladly—but American money has not the same value in Westchester as it has in the other subur—territories continguous to New York City. Which was the reason for the rushing realtor's sustained approval. Building lots are priced about the same in Westchester as in the suburbs; dwellings cost about the same to build. But the juxtaposition of house and lot brings into being an inexplicable increment of value in Westchester. A realtor in Bergen or in Richmond has his work cut out for him to sell a six-room house on two lots for seven-five; the prospective purchaser grips a cigar between his teeth and tramps through the house from cellar to attic, thinking up awkward questions, crawling out onto the roof to scratch the allegedly copper gutters, bristling with suspicion. But in Westchester the prospect sits with wooden face behind the wheel of the family car until his lady—returning enchanted—tells him that that wonderful six-room-and-tiled-bath brand-new Old English farmhouse can be had if taken instantly for a mere fifteen thousand. And two full lots, my dear! And the prospect, loving peace and willing to eat herbs for ten years to get it, emits a hollow groan and reaches for the deposit.

"Class," murmured the realtor as a turn of the road showed him a new development of twenty Old English farmhouses sitting companionably cheek by jowl. "Class!"

Taxes are pretty high in Westchester; in its more elegant communities there are no office buildings or factories—voteless things—upon which to saddle the upkeep of the magnificent distances. In several of these communities there are no stores, and there is but a single line of trolley.

"I wonder what hit that village of Teneyck," muttered the realtor, who lived by talking and had to keep up his proficiency. "It ought to have gone big, back there in that country. Gosh, it looks like one of these new Atlantic Cities that they build every little while. And what *has* Atlantic City got—or Bronxville—or Fifth Avenue—or any of those places where they get two prices for the same thing? I can't see that

they got anything on the neighborhood—except the people. Well, yes—they got the people! I shouldn't wonder but what if all the people moved out of those places they would not be worth very much."

II.

Being very fond of children—even of such gutta-percha children as play one-o'-cat in the centers of New York streets—Jack Lafflin made his flivver hug the tailboard of the big motor truck which was slamming around the corner into One Hundred and Seventy-sixth Street. The truck howled once for way and then hurtled straight at the gutta-percha boy who had struck his little cat and sent it tumbling into air; the boy stood with legs braced apart and stick poised to strike the cat; in that instant one could see that he was calculating coldly his chance of hitting the tantalizing cat before the truck hit him; evidently his calculations favored the truck—he let the cat fall unhit and leaped back with a frown of impatience while the ten tons of truck and cargo roared thunderously over the spot whereon he had stood.

"Ba-a, ba-a!" pleaded Jack Lafflin's flivver, leaving the shelter of the masterful truck and begging its way to the curb. Without hitting any of the children Jack docked his car before the Tuileries. Jack descended, locked his wheels hopefully against car thieves and went meandering among the baby carriages on the sidewalk. When he came to the Tuileries he picked his way up the stone steps among the dozen tenants who sat there on straw pads. The hour was half past five in the afternoon; the Gillespies—to whose flat Jack was going—dined at half past six, but he was sure that he and Miss Sarah Gillespie would succeed in killing the intervening hour.

In the main hall of the Tuileries—marble to the ceiling, with let-in panels of onyx—there was indeed a powerful smell of dinner. The tart smell of a New England boiled dinner was there, the earthy perfume of turnips, the spicy emanations of bubbling onions, the flavors of sugar-cured ham and smoked bacon and good salt pork; there was also the exotic fragrance of garlic, the tang of herrings and the amicably contending odors of potatoes French fried and German fried and hashed brown and baked and Lyonnaise. The air had been fortified by honest sauerkraut and was sustained by the breath of browning roast beef. Jack walked to the end of the marble hall and rang a bell at a door beside the first flight of the iron stairs. The door opened instantly.

"Jack!" hissed Miss Sarah Gillespie. *"Don't!* Stop, I say! Do you like veal stew? Go back and close the door."

"I'm crazy about it," he said, following her down the hall.

"This is Mr. Lafflin, papa," said Sarah to a white-faced man who sat in shirt sleeves on the landing of the fire escape outside the open living-room window. On the fire escape—besides Mr. Gillespie—were two rubber plants, a lemon tree, and four geraniums in pots. Mr. Gillespie then was sitting in his conservatory. He was very fond of flowers.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Lafflin," said he, climbing back into his flat and taking Jack by the hand.

Sarah sighed pleasedly and hurried back to the veal stew. It had been an important moment, that of this meeting. She had been sure, of course, that her father would like Jack instantly; and Jack had appeared to be equally pleased to meet her father.

"Nice apartment you have here," said Jack, looking approvingly about him in the stuffy four-room flat. He was sincere; any flat was nice that held his Sarah.

"It's nice and shady," agreed Mr. Gillespie. "The rent is plenty, though."

"What are you paying?"

"Forty."

"That's enough for a ground-floor rear," nodded Jack. "I'm in the business, you know; that's why I asked."

"Sarah said you were in the real-estate business. I was wondering if maybe you couldn't find us another flat."

"I imagine we could," said Jack slowly. "What's the matter with this one?"

"Nothing. Only——"

"Will you come now?" called Sarah.

They went, and dined very well. Sarah had provided excellent company for her excellent veal stew. They began with English beef soup—eight cents per can—ate a foot of smoked eel, dallied with a delicious *hors d'œuvre* compounded of chopped beets and sweet pickles in olive oil, and ended with bland and cold and luscious *spumoni*. When a girl is working in an office downtown all day and has to rush home to clap an important dinner on the table a good delicatessen around the corner is a blessing. The

tense smile left Sarah's face and she permitted herself in her relief to look even a little weary when she saw that her dinner was a success. Her father behaved like the good sport that he was, and made no jokes, but ate as though he dined like a lord every evening in the week.

And then, with that simple joy which comes only to the person who thinks he is doing a good deed, she produced two large and beautiful and very bad cigars.

"Perfectos!" she exulted. "It said so on the box. I got them on St. Nicholas Avenue, in that new novelty store, and they cost only five cents a piece. Wasn't that a bargain?"

"I do like a good cigar," said Jack, pulling boldly on the cylinder of vegetable matter.

"Sit there and enjoy them," said Sarah, bearing dishes into the dark little kitchen.

She returned hurriedly a minute later and scrutinized the gentlemen; they were lolling at ease, smoking their cigars in a contented silence.

"That's funny," she said. "I just looked out into the court and I saw what looked like two cigars burning on the pavement."

"They ought to stop those Spaniards upstairs from throwing lighted cigars and cigarettes from their windows," said her father, looking at Jack.

"Risky thing to do," nodded Jack. "Sets awnings on fire. Now, this is what I call a real good cigar!"

"I'm so glad you like it," said Sarah gratefully. "I'll have them for you every time you come after this!"

"Please don't bother," begged Jack.

She returned to the kitchen. "Show Jack that letter about the apartment, papa!" she called.

Jack took the letter, the body of which was mimeographed:

RANDALL GILLESPIE, ESQ.
The Tuileries,
West 176th Street, NYC. June 14th

DEAR SIR: We are pleased to inform you that arrangements have been made by the Iota Realty Corporation which owns the Tuileries to sell that apartment house to the tenants under a plan

ONE HUNDRED PERCENT COOPERATIVE!

Every apartment is to be sold to a separate owner for his own occupancy. This complies with the Rent Laws, and we positively guarantee possession.

The price of your apartment will be Seven Thousand Dollars, payable Four Thousand in cash and Three Thousand by taking subject to the present mortgages on the house.

If you desire to purchase your apartment on these terms please let us hear from you at once; we feel that we should give the present tenants the first chance before accepting any of the many pending applications from outsiders.

Very Truly Yours,
PFISTER & STARRETT.

"Some kind of a bluff, isn't it?" asked Mr. Gillespie hopefully. "The new rent laws will protect us, I guess."

But Jack was staring at the letter with a very dour face.

"I'm afraid this is no bluff, pop," he said. "When did the Iota Realty Corporation buy this house?"

"I think it was only last week that I heard the house was sold."

Jack nodded, with pursed lips. "He's a fast worker. The Iota Realty Corporation is one of Jake Brower's companies. I saw the notice of incorporation in the newspaper a few days ago and the address was Jake Brower's office. If you don't know Jake Brower I can tell you that he's the biggest real-estate operator in New York; and he's as cold-blooded as a turnip. And he's infernally clever. This is no bluff, pop; you're going to buy this apartment from Jake Brower or you're going to move out!"

"But what about the rent laws?"

"This is one of the holes in the rent laws." Jack whipped out a pencil and went to figuring on the back of the letter.

"How many apartments are there in this house?"

"Forty-five."

"Um-m. Every tenant, no doubt, got such a letter as this. And seven times forty-five is three hundred and fifteen. Three hundred and fifteen thousand dollars! That's the price he is asking the tenants to pay for the house. And, in my opinion, the house is not worth over two hundred thousand. I dare say Jake Brower bought it cheaper than that. I know he never puts up more than twenty-five thousand dollars cash in buying a house of this size and character; taking the total of the mortgages at three thousand per apartment, the mortgages are around one hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars—plus twenty-five, makes one hundred and sixty thousand. Jake Brower paid somewhere around one hundred and sixty thousand dollars last week for this house that he's going to force the tenants to buy for *three hundred and fifteen!*"

"I don't know anything about real estate, Jack," said Mr. Gillespie, looking uneasy. "It doesn't seem fair, to me."

"It's not fair," growled Jack angrily. "It's a gouge! But what are you going to do about it?"

"Well—what *are* we going to do about it?"

"Could you pay the four thousand dollars, if you had to?"

"No, I couldn't, Jack. No part of it. My position in the city department of finance pays me one hundred and seventy-five per month and I haven't been able to save a nickel for years on account of the prices. That's why Sarah is working, Jack. I had other plans for her, years ago, but they —"

Her father shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you've got to move. But you'll have to pay more rent somewhere else. A whole lot more."

"How much?"

"You'll have to pay at least a hundred per month for a flat like this. That will be cheap in the present market—and you needn't expect any consideration from Jake Brower. He won't give you an extra day to look around. You're a monthly tenant, aren't you? Well, the day he sells this flat you'll get a notice to quit at the end of the month. And he'll sell it!"

"I suppose so," said Gillespie grimly. "All that a man has he will give for a roof over his family's head, eh? Well, we'll simply have to pull in our belts! But I know some other tenants in this house that are going to be badly up against it. Lord knows what will become of them, some of them. One hundred per month for a flat like this? Why, Jack, when we moved in here eight years ago we paid only twenty-five per month for it!"

Jack nodded in gloomy abstraction. There was a silence.

"I was thinking of a place I saw up in Westchester to-day," he said rousing himself and trying to be entertaining. "There's a little village up there called Teneyck, about forty miles out, and not a soul living in it! One of the queerest sights you ever saw. There were twenty-five or thirty houses in it, most of them with stores downstairs—and good houses too! Well built and comfortable looking. And a pretty country roundabout with nothing against it except that it's out of the way; the village is five miles from the nearest station, so that commuters can't very well live there.

"The property came in to us to sell a few days ago and I stopped there this morning and put up some signs. I don't know who'd buy it while it's lying vacant like that."

He stopped suddenly and glared at his host.

"Cramp?" asked Gillespie anxiously.

"No, not at all. I was just thinking——"

## III.

Mr. Eli Kipp, ship chandler by trade and owner of the village of Teneyck by inheritance, sat in his office on Water Street and discussed his white elephant with Jack Laffin. He was a gray little merchant, courteous but dogged.

"The village was condemned some years ago for the new waterworks," he explained. "You remember when New York City built the Catskill aqueduct? Well, Teneyck was inside one of the dams as originally planned and the land was condemned and taken over by the city. Later on the plans were changed and Teneyck was left outside the dam. That's the whole mystery! When the city took the property it made everybody move out—and I want to say that some of those families had lived there for two hundred years. They're gone now—scattered.

"Two years ago the city sold off at auction some properties that it had no use for and among them was the village of Teneyck. The city paid me in the condemnation proceeding four hundred thousand dollars for the property and when I saw a chance to buy it back for a hundred thousand I thought it was a wonderful buy. I paid the city ninety-five thousand dollars for it at the auction—and I'll sell it for seventy-five thousand cash now."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Nothing's the matter with it except that nobody lives there any more! The place is dead. The houses are nice houses but they're not nice enough to satisfy people who can afford to live five miles from nowhere, and medium-class people have got to be able to get to and from their jobs. It's not a farming proposition and the houses can't be sold off piecemeal because one family or two or three couldn't live there by themselves any more than they could live here if everybody else moved out of New York City. A big city or a little village is

like a watch; it's got to run as a unit or it won't run at all. The butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker have all got to move back into Teneyck in order to start it up again! I thought you might be able to find some corporation that could start an industry in the neighborhood."

"Teneyck must have had some reason for existence in the beginning."

"Oh, yes! I've told you it was one of the oldest settlements in that part of the county, and it was coming nicely. It lived by serving the farmers in that neighborhood, and it had quite a transient trade on that good automobile road."

"Would you trade it?"

"For what?"

"Here's an apartment house up on Washington Heights," said Jack, spreading the particulars of the Tuileries on the desk before Kipp. "I got this from the owner this morning; he's a speculator and he'll trade for anything that shows him a profit.

"This is a forty-five family walkup and rents for twenty-four thousand per year. The mortgages total one hundred and twenty thousand dollars and I think I can get Brower to swap you the equity for your village. At the present rents the Tuileries will net you eight thousand per year."

"At the present rents," grunted Kipp. "Suppose the tenants move out on me?"

"I can arrange for every tenant in the house to take a long lease at the present rent, and give you some security!"

"That doesn't sound bad," said Kipp, studying the lists of figures cautiously. "But, look here—the owner is asking three hundred thousand dollars for this apartment house! That gives him an equity of one hundred and eighty thousand dollars and I'm only asking seventy-five for mine. How do you expect to make up the difference?"

"By asking a hundred and eighty thousand dollars for your village," smiled Jack. "Trade prices don't mean anything, Mr. Kipp. Just you tell me that you'll swap your village for this apartment house and let me arrange the figures so as to make both sides feel good!"

"Get me the offer," said Kipp briskly. "Speaking frankly, I won't be so awful hard to please, as I am just a little weary of that village. I'll look at the house this evening and you can go ahead meanwhile until I stop you. What's your commission?"

"On selling country property, five per cent."

"That's five per cent on a price of seventy-five thousand, mind—and not on your imaginary one hundred and eighty! Very well—get me the offer."

Jack walked from the Water Street office with a huge bunch of keys, enough of them to open every door in the village of Teneyck, and with carte blanche to use his own judgment in methods of selling.

That evening Mr. Kipp inspected the Tuileries. He was delighted with his reception, finding a very amiable and obliging set of tenants. The attitude of the tenants of the Tuileries would have struck him with amazement if he had been used to visiting apartment houses in the character of prospective buyer. In those days—which are not yet quite gone—the tenants of New York had been chivvied into a state of chronic moroseness by persistent and merciless rent raising. They knew that the sale of an apartment house meant almost invariably another determined attempt to boost rents; they had fought the last landlord to a halt—and now here came another man to buy the house, a man who would attack them with new vim and enthusiasm! Wherefore they ordinarily shut their doors and refused flatly to permit the prospective purchaser to inspect their apartments. Hamburger the janitor could not understand the situation at all when he beheld apartment doors fly open at his timid rap and saw the fiercest of tenants bowing smiling invitations in the doorways.

"Very courteous gentleman," commented Kipp as they left the apartment of Peter Costello, a local saloon keeper. "In fact, they're all very nice."

"And especially Pete Costello!" murmured Hamburger. "There's monkey business here."

But then Hamburger had not been invited to a conference which had been held in the Gillespie flat at seven o'clock that same evening.

The conference—called by Mr. Gillespie at the suggestion of Jack Lafflin—was attended by Mr. Peter Costello the saloon keeper, Mr. Pincus Rubin the tailor and presser, Mr. Andrew M'Candliss the garage keeper, Miss Harriet Tipstaff the public-school teacher, Mr. Adolf Oberfelder the grocer, and Mr. Stefan Chapinsky of Chapinsky's delicatessen—all being tenants of

the Tuileries. They knew one another very well by sight, having lived for years in the same house, although they spoke to one another now for the first time.

"Sure I got the letter," said Peter Costello—a portly man with a big smooth face and shrewd gray eyes—a man with the face of a clergyman and the eyes of a small politician. Mr. Costello had survived twenty years in the liquor business, and that is an extremely perilous business; it is as perilous to keep a saloon as it is to be born very rich or to captain a pirate ship. Mr. Costello was a man of self-control, force of character and knowledge of human nature—a rather engaging rascal. He had held a chair for Miss Harriet Tipstaff with such evident solicitude that the little old maid colored prettily as she glanced up at him.

"Yah!" grunted Adolf Oberfelder, emitting a mouthful of smoke through his yellow mustache. He sat stolid and attentive, waiting to be integrated—a man of no original genius, but a man to be absolutely depended on when placed, a man to stay put—whether behind a machine gun or behind a grocery counter. The Polish delicatessen keeper sat beside him, eying him covertly, drawing confidence from the *Plattdeutscher's* placidity.

"I guess we got to buy the house, ain't it?" said Pincus Rubin, passing his yellow hand over his baldish head. He wore a placating smirk and was evidently anxious to appear yielding; but his black eyes were vigilant.

"We are not going to buy the house!" bristled Andrew M'Candliss. "It's a swendle, Mister-r R-Rubin."

"I'm trying to arrange a deal, gentlemen," said Jack, "whereby you'll be able to stay here at the same rents and you won't have to buy your apartments. I'm trying to swing a trade of this house for certain vacant property up in the country."

"What's in it for you, mister?" asked M'Candliss.

"The commissions on the sale."

"Aye—aye," breathed the garage keeper contentedly. "Go on, lad."

"I want to sell this house subject to long-term leases," explained Jack. "Every one of you will get a three or a five-year lease, just as you please, and at the rent you're paying now. That'll settle the housing problem for you. The proposed buyer of the house doesn't want to raise your rents—he's not in the real-estate business and he doesn't know that he can get more rent for your apartments and he is quite satisfied with what you're paying now. The only thing that's worrying him is whether you'll keep on paying the same rent, and I guess we can assure him of that. So I propose to put right into the contract of exchange that this house is to be delivered subject to long leases on every apartment."

"Great!" nodded Peter Costello encouragingly. He had frowned when M'Candliss had asked so bluntly as to Jack's interest. "Count on us, young fellow. How can we plug your game?"

"In the first place, you can help out by being nice to the proposed buyer when he comes here this evening."

"Send him up to me," said Costello cordially. "I got a bottle up there that will make him feel good enough to kiss a Chinaman!"

"I hope and trust," said Miss Tipstaff with distaste, "that this gentleman whom you call the proposed buyer will not be permitted to acquire an erroneous impression of the tenants, who are without exception—or perhaps I should rather say *almost* without exception—law-abiding and respectable folks. If you send the gentleman to my apartment I shall succeed in gaining his good will. And if he should desire any refreshment I can brew him an excellent——"

"Oh, no," interposed Costello decidedly. "No home-brew! *You* like to drink that stuff, Miss Tipstaff, but take it from me it's rank poison. He'll drink it to be polite but he'll go away sore on you."

"An excellent cup of tea," continued Miss Tipstaff, looking at him frigidly.

"We shall certainly send him to you, Miss Tipstaff," said Jack smoothly. "He'll know it takes all sorts of people to make up a New York apartment house.

"I'm confident that this end of the deal will run on wheels. The part I'm doubtful about is the vacant stuff up in the country!

"You see, the present owner of this house is a speculator and is one of the cleverest and hardest in the game. We've got to persuade him to take that country property. The plan I have in mind requires a certain amount of deceit, and I've had some qualms in considering it, but I've decided that you people need not be overnice in protecting yourselves.

"My idea is to get him out there, by hook or by crook, and have him look at the

village and thus set his mind to working upon some way of using it. I won't be party to any attempt to cheat him and before the deal is made he's going to hear everything I know about the property. By that time he will probably have decided how the property can be sold to his advantage and he will then be willing to buy it vacant. But I know that he won't pay a fair price for it if he thinks the owner is in a hole, so—the village of Teneyck must not be deserted when Jake Brower looks at it!"

"Where are you going to get the merry villagers from?" asked Peter Costello.

"From the Tuileries!" grinned Jack. "It's lovely weather in the country these days. What do you say if we arrange for a great big picnic—everybody in the house to go up there over Saturday and Sunday and camp out in the village of Teneyck?"

"You son of a gun!" cried Costello, clapping Jack on the shoulder.

"I could maybe contrive to find a truck or two," said M'Candliss cautiously.

"You could find half a dozen," said Costello.

"And you could pay for them!" flared back M'Candliss.

"I'll pay for three of them—actual expense," said Costello. "It'll be worth the money to beat that landlord! The Dutchman here has a delivery wagon and can put up the groceries. What do you say, Oberfelder—will you be quartermaster general?"

"Yah!" grunted the grocer, opening his mouth to let out a second gulp of smoke.

"I shouldn't like to miss services on Sunday morning," demurred Miss Tipstaff. "Although it would be in a worthy cause."

"And I wouldn't be party to causing any garageman to miss church either," said Costello. "The Lord knows they need it! Didn't I see you walking out last Sunday afternoon with a handsome young man in a Roman collar, Miss Tipstaff?"

"That was the Reverend Storer," said Miss Tipstaff, smiling self-consciously. "He is a very brilliant divine, although he has no pastorate at present. Perhaps he would consent to come with us on our holiday."

"If you ask him," said Costello, with a wink at which she did not take offense. "He is certainly awful hard hit, Miss Tipstaff. I'm cursed if he wasn't looking at you like a ragamuffin with his nose against a candy-store window! No offense, you understand, Miss Tipstaff."

"Not at all, Mr. Costello," she said sweetly. "I am sure you are only joking."

IV.

At one o'clock on Saturday afternoon Mr. Jack Lafflin stood outside the marble-fronted office of Felix J. Hopper, Inc., on West Seventy-second Street. He was elegantly attired in a suit of a small black-and-white check, white silk shirt with soft collar, and blue silk cravat and hose with red clocks. A rolled-brim straw hat with polychrome band was on his tight red curls. In his hand was a white Malacca cane.

A big and powerful limousine hummed smoothly around the Broadway corner and drew up at the curb. Jack crossed the sidewalk to it. The glasses in the doors were let down in deference to the hot weather. Two gentlemen were sitting in the tonneau. One was a thin and dark and dyspeptic-looking person. The other, upon whom Jack smiled his best smile, was a short and wide man, swollen with fat like a wrestler gone to seed. He had a big and impassive face and a pair of very cold and very penetrating gray eyes; his gaze was frank and understanding, but cynical and unsympathetic.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Brower!" smiled Jack.

The real-estate operator nodded shortly, while he tucked a linen handkerchief inside his low stiff collar.

"Hello, Lafflin. Sit up in front there, if you don't mind; we're talking business. John, pull up those windows so our talking won't annoy Mr. Lafflin. He'll direct you on the road."

The car started up Broadway. Jack was not at all offended by Jake Brower's unequivocal manner; the operator trusted no brokers more than he had to and lost no politeness on them. He was discussing a private matter with the dark gentleman beside him and did not propose to be overheard. But Jake Brower always paid a full commission, and sometimes a double commission, and scrupulously respected his obligations to brokers, wherefore the profession put up with his brusqueness.

At half past two o'clock the limousine slid over the brow of the hill and rolled down into the erstwhile deserted village of Teneyck.

"Fine thriving little development!" said Jake Brower gratulatingly. "Your money

will be safe here, Goldfarb. It will be like putting it into bank stock!"

They descended from the limousine and walked along the flagged sidewalk.

The village consisted of about two dozen cottages set back from the road. Extensions had been built from half of these houses to the walk, making shops with many-paned show windows; faded shades had been drawn down behind several of these show windows as if to shield displays of merchandise from the sunlight. Several dozen suits on hangers were to be seen in the window of the little tailor shop; they saw Pincus Rubin in the shop, pushing a hot goose over a garment which he was pressing; Rubin had brought enough work with him from the city to keep him busy. The big doors of the garage stood open; eleven assorted motor vehicles were on the floor inside. They heard the swish of scythes; a detail of villagers was finishing the cutting of the tall grass on the plots before the cottages and along the flagged walk. From the upper windows of the cottages leaned many buxom housewives, airing the rooms, shaking out bedding, washing the panes. .

On the threshold of the little red schoolhouse stood Miss Harriet Tipstaff ringing an unmistakable school bell; a rabble of children trooped obediently toward her. Sturdy yokels shouted with honest joy as they played baseball on the newly clipped village green. Down the sidewalk strolled the Reverend Storer, dignified and slow, a simple village pastor if ever there was one.

A person acquainted with villages might have been puzzled by a certain rawness and air of improvisation; and he might have been touched with wonder at the enthusiasm with which the inhabitants carried on the business of villagers, in view of the hoary antiquity of Teneyck. The inhabitants were clad in overalls and wide steeple-crowned straw hats and red-and-blue neckerchiefs, but they were surprisingly pale and flabby looking. Many of them had big stomachs inside the overalls, and double chins behind the neckerchiefs, and their shoes were of a brightness and smartness that was hardly authentic. But then, fortunately, neither Jake Brower nor Mr. Goldfarb had any acquaintance with villages and villagers. A shade of puzzlement did indeed show at times on the bland visage of Mr. Jake Brower and he seemed to be putting disturbing thoughts from him.

"Where do you live, my little lad?" asked Mr. Goldfarb paternally, putting his hand on the tousled head of a barefoot boy who was leaning against a picket fence.

"N'Yawk," said the urchin cheerfully. "A Hunnerd an' Seventy-sixt' Street! Us people- —"

"Wil-lie-e!" shrilled a village dame from an upper window behind him.

"Yes, ma," said Willie, going.

"Look at the children dancing!" exclaimed Jake Brower hurriedly, hustling Mr. Goldfarb about to face the schoolhouse. "Pretty, isn't it? I call it quaint."

"They're teaching the children dances like that in the New York public schools nowadays," said Mr. Goldfarb innocently. "Odd, isn't it, that that little fellow used to live in New York!"

"Oh, you find New Yorkers all over," said Jack.

"Yes," chimed Jake Brower in a flat tone; for a moment he held Jack with a glittering eye, and then his meaning glance roamed about. "You find them all over!"

"I wonder if we couldn't get a bite to eat," suggested Mr. Goldfarb. "I came away without my lunch."

"There's the inn," said Jack.

Mr. Peter Costello, shining in newly laundered duck, met them on the porch.

"I'll have a table set for you out here, gents," he said. "We're painting and renovating inside but it will be pleasant out here."

Mrs. Costello appeared at once and spread a cloth over one end of a long deal table.

"What will it be, gents?" asked Costello, bending hospitably above them. "We have some lovely ham and eggs."

"Ham I couldn't eat," said Mr. Goldfarb. "What else have you got?"

"Everything your heart could wish, sir," said Costello. "And all of the best, off our own farm. Let's see—how about a nice omelet? Or a couple of nice poached eggs on toast? Or some eggs à la——"

"How about a steak?" asked Jake Brower.

"I couldn't exactly recommend the steak to-day, gents," said Costello frankly.

"How about some chops?"

"Pork chops?" asked the landlord, studying Goldfarb's face.

"Pork I couldn't eat," said Goldfarb impatiently.

"Ah," breathed Costello. "Then you

wouldn't care about some nice country pork sausages, or some sweet home-cured bacon, or some fresh pork with apple sauce, or a nice pig's head, or some trotters in jelly."

"No, no!" refused Goldfarb.

"We've got anything you wish," said Costello perplexedly. "We have some very nice ham."

"You don't happen to have any *eggs*, do you?" inquired Jake Brower.

"We have all kinds of eggs!" said the landlord gladly. "Ham and eggs? Right! And a nice omelet. On the fire, gents!"

While they were eating several automobiles stopped in the road and parties entered onto the porch. After considerable fencing Costello set these new arrivals to eating ham and eggs.

"You do a nice business here, landlord," said Jake Brower.

"Not a kick in the world except that I can't get a long lease," said Costello promptly.

"What rent could you pay on a long lease?" asked Goldfarb. "I know the owner very intimately and I could mention it to him."

"Oh, I wouldn't stop for three thousand a year," said Costello largely. "I hear there's several people after this place too. They want to get in here and profiteer on the reputation I've built up."

Jake Brower placed a five-dollar bill on the table.

"Just right," said Costello, pocketing it. "Call again, gents!"

"I guess he could afford to pay three thousand per year when he charges like that," said Goldfarb, impressed.

"It's a high-class place," said Jake Brower, swallowing his indignation. "All these road houses are robbers and the people seem to like it!"

The village of Teneyck was making a determined effort to return to life. M'Candliss and an accomplice were tinkering leisurely with an automobile which had stopped for a small repair. In front of the schoolhouse was a farmer's wagon; the farmer was talking to Miss Tipstaff and pointing to three yellow-haired children who were looking over the side of the wagon. A farm hand had wandered into town from the hinterland and was peering into a tailor shop; Pincus Rubin hurried out, bowing and rubbing his hands, and laid hold of the farm hand and led him protesting into the shop, and proceeded to measure him for a suit of clothes.

"Do you want to go through the houses, Mr. Brower?" asked Jack.

"Do you want to, Goldfarb?" asked Jake Brower.

"We could look inside one," agreed Goldfarb.

They went through one cottage, which had been furnished for their inspection. They tried the doors of several others without success, finding no one at home.

"They're all very similar," said Jack. "You see, the Kipp family has owned this place for the last two hundred years—they used to own all this corner of Westchester County—and they built all these houses and naturally they built one as good as the next."

"How much land is there in the village?" asked Goldfarb.

"One hundred and sixty acres within the corporate limits," said Jack, who had gotten his figures from the ship chandler. "A lease of five acres of farm land goes with each cottage. The Kipps used to be great people here, years ago when they lived in the big mansion over the hills, and most of the people in the village here worked for them. When the Kipp family moved away the village went on by itself."

They approached the limousine.

"I had to pay fifty cents for gas in that place, sir," said the chauffeur to Jake Brower. "And mighty independent he was, too. S'truth there's not another place within five miles."

"Must do a nice business," said Jake Brower, his eyes glistening at this new outrage. "I'll bet he'd stand for a big boost in rent before getting out, and I'm going to give it to him."

"He said to me he made twelve thousand dollars there last summer," said the chauffeur, proud of his acquired information. "I asked him a question or two, not letting on who we were, sir."

"What do you think of it?" asked Jake Brower of Goldfarb.

"It looks as if it could stand for sixty thousand."

"But I tell you I'm paying one hundred and eighty for it," protested the speculator. "And that doesn't begin to state its value! I tell you the city of New York paid four hundred thousand dollars for this property when it was condemned for the new aque-

duct, and even supposing the city paid twenty-five per cent too much——"

Then the door of the limousine slammed and Jack lost track of the conversation. But he had heard enough to tell him that Jake Brower had investigated the proposition with his accustomed thoroughness. It was not surprising that he had discovered the condemnation proceeding, as that was a matter of public record; it was fortunate that he had not learned that the village had been deserted for several years last past. Or had he perhaps learned it? And was his incuriousness as to the sudden repeopling of the place caused by——

"He's selling it to Goldfarb!" exclaimed Jack; and he felt enlightened as to the reason for Jake Brower's complaisance.

V.

It was on a Saturday morning two weeks later that Jack received his answer from Jake Brower on the proposed swap of Brower's apartment house for the deserted village of Teneyck. Jack recognized the large and square envelope and picked it eagerly forth from the little pile of mail which lay on his desk in the Hopper office on Seventy-second Street. He tore it open:

JOHN LAFFLIN, ESQ.
Felix J. Hopper, Inc.
West 72d Street, NYC. June 30th.

DEAR SIR: In reference to the country property which you offered me in exchange for apartment-house the Tuileries on One Hundred and Seventy-sixth Street. Kindly prepare contract of exchange, and have same signed by the other side. The country property is to be given to me free and clear; my property is to be subject to first and second mortgage totaling one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. It is understood that your commission will not be earned or payable until deeds are passed; the exchange price of my property to be three hundred thousand dollars. Bring me signed contracts by twelve o'clock to-day.

Yours for Better Real Estate,
JACOB BROWER.

Bright-faced with joyous excitement Jack set his pencil to work, totting up for the tenth time the commissions which would accrue to him from the deal. On the sale of the Tuileries he would receive thirty-six hundred dollars; on the sale of the Teneyck property he would receive thirty-seven hundred and fifty—seven thousand three hundred and fifty dollars, half of which he must turn in to the firm. But there would still remain to him thirty-six hundred and seventy-five dollars!

It was a tremendous amount of money. Jack was twenty-six years old; in the previous year he had averaged three hundred per month by working without stop or let-up, and here he had made a year's salary in two weeks! Why, if he could keep up that gait he would make not far from a hundred thousand per year! Well, of course he could not expect to keep it up, but even one more such commission in the year—and surely he could make *one* more—would give him enough for two to live on. And would he have to be content with only one more when he had a girl like Sarah Gillespie—Sarah Gillespie Lafflin!—to work for? Pshaw!

But there was one detail to be straightened out. He picked up the telephone and called Jake Brower.

"Hello, Mr. Brower. This is Lafflin, of the Hopper office. I got your letter this morning. But say, Mr. Brower, there was one thing I wanted to explain to you——"

"Have you got the contracts?" broke in the operator.

"I can get them in an hour. But say, Mr. Brower, I wanted to explain one thing to you——"

"Don't explain anything to me, my boy!" said Brower forcibly. "Just get the contracts down here to me."

"But really, Mr. Brower, I feel it is my duty to explain this to you. I really must do it!"

"I'm warning you *not* to explain anything," came the cold voice over the wire. "I don't want any explanations—understand?"

"But really, Mr. Brower," persisted Jack, "I have to tell you this. It's about that village up in the country! Mr. Brower, the people you saw there don't live there at all. I colonized the place so as to get you interested in the deal; I figured that you'd probably arrange to resell the place before you bought it, see? You know that's the way you ordinarily do, Mr. Brower. Say, who is Goldfarb? Is he some kind of a developer? What does he want the property for? Oh, I caught on right away that he wasn't looking at the property for nothing! Well, he can have immediate possession of it, Mr. Brower! Nobody lives there!"

"Good-by," said a disgusted voice. "And don't mind about the contracts."

"What was that, Mr. Brower? I didn't get that!"

"You got it. I said not to mind about the contracts. The deal is off. I won't make the trade. Good-by."

"Hello—hello! But, Mr. Brower ——"

"Just a minute, Laffiin. Goldfarb, if you must know it, is the vice president of the Cosmopolitan Finance Corporation, and I brought him up there with a view to obtaining a mortgage on that country stuff. He agreed to lend me one hundred thousand dollars. Your burlesque village looked perfectly all right to Goldfarb and he agreed to lend the money. I had some lively suspicions but I didn't ask any questions and was satisfied to let the deal go through for the sake of getting that loan. But it is a very different matter when you tell me about it; I do too much business with Goldfarb's people to be any party to such a deal when I've been explicitly put on notice. Good-by!"

"*But*, Mr. Brower——"

The line had gone dead. Jack hung up the receiver.

What infernal luck! He had been so confident that Goldfarb was a buyer and therefore a person who would be only too glad to take the property vacant without any of the bother and fuss of securing possession from the tenants. And he was a lender—an individual who would shy affrightedly from vacant property. What infernal luck!

Slowly Jack tore up the sheet upon which he had figured his coming commissions. There would probably not be enough for two this year. Jake Brower would push his scheme to sell the Tuileries upon the perfectly legal one-hundred-per-cent co-operative plan, and the Gillespies would have to go house hunting at once while they moved several pegs down in the scale of living. A very fine air castle had crashed. He must go up and tell them.

With face besmeared with gloom he left the office and went to his trusty flivver at the curb. He rode up to One Hundred and Seventy-sixth Street.

It was Saturday, a holiday, but it seemed to him that there were fewer of the gutta-percha children at play in the street. And there were very few baby carriages being dandled on the sidewalk. There were no tenants at all on the stoop of the Tuileries; the windows looked blankly down at him—no colorful bedclothes flapped in the morning wind, no housewives shook forth rugs or feather dusters in sturdy defiance of the city ordinance in that case made and provided, no tiny children teetered precariously on the dizzy fire escapes.

"They're gone again," grunted Hamburger the janitor, who stood smoking his pipe on the iron stair which ran down into the areaway.

"Where did they go?"

"Search me! The automobiles came this morning and the whole house piled in and away they went. They wouldn't tell me a thing—but they can't fool me! It's politics, that's what it is. It's a Spring Outing and Chowder Party, that's what it is! Somebody is running for something—Pete Costello, I guess—from the way he was bossing things. This is the third Saturday!"

Jack needed no more information. He jumped back into his rattletrap and sent it bouncing northward toward Westchester County.

At half past twelve he entered again the rustic precincts of the village of Teneyck. But it was a very different community from the deserted place which he had hung signs on less than three weeks before. Teneyck was a boom town!

All the stores were open for business and they had the merchandise to sell. In the grocery store Oberfelder was bustling obsequiously about, selling canned and package goods to farmers' wives. In the adjoining window was an excellent display of hardware—excellent for a remote Westchester village; Griffin, who had a dingy little shop on Amsterdam Avenue where he struggled from dark to dark to meet his rent was getting two prices for goods which had rusted on his city counters. A big-barreled and red-faced gentleman was inspecting a bunch of bananas which hung outside the grocery; he tore off a fine black-and-yellow one and strolled away, eating it, without bothering to pay for it; Jack was about to call Oberfelder's attention to this despoiling when he recognized the big-barreled gentleman as Patrolman Malarkey of the New York force, who was a tenant in the Tuileries and who was absent-mindedly exercising his prescriptive right to free fruit. An automobile party had stopped before Dimon's Novelty and Souvenir Shop and evidently were contemplating the purchase of mementos, such as five-cent Havana perfectos imported direct from St. Nicholas Avenue.

"Sure, we're a village!" chuckled Peter

Costello, climbing down from hanging a new sign with the legend "Hop Inn." "What is any New York apartment house, young fellow, but a village? We've just spread out on the flat, that's all.

"This is the life," he said, looking around at his yard with its newly whitewashed stones. "The great open spaces, young fellow! Look at those hills—look at those blamed trees! Talk of Central Park on a Sunday morning—talk of Riverside Drive—why, say, young fellow, they're only back yards compared to this place! This is the country you read about, where men are *men*, and not blamed tenants living on a shelf. The people have made more real money in the last two week-ends than they made all week in the city."

"You've done pretty well, Mr. Costello."

"I'm not kicking," said the saloon keeper. "I've made a few berries on these here automobiles. I make more in the store in New York but what I like about this place is I keep what I make and do not have to give it all up to collectors who will put me out of business if I renege. And no worries! When a customer walks in I do not have to be a mind reader to see if he is a revenue man, and when he puts his hand in his pocket I do not have to wonder is he reaching for his handkerchief or a search warrant. I tell you, young fellow, I am sick and tired of being a disrespectful saloon keeper and if I could get a lease of this place at a right rent I do not know but what I would settle down. It's *clean!*"

"You say the other tenants feel the same way?" asked Jack.

"And why shouldn't they? Look at their kids out there playing in the lots and getting redder and fatter by the minute! Look at the rooms they got here—why, most of them have got houses to themselves, whole blamed *houses!* And there ain't one of them but has got some racket they can make money out of, and no competition. Why, say, young fellow, this place is Palm Beach and Bermuda alongside of living in three or four holes in the wall in a bum New York flat! They're coming in here to eat now. You *ask* them!"

## VI.

The first town meeting of the newly repopulated village of Teneyck was held that night on the spacious porch of the Hop Inn. The rude fathers of the hamlet were ranged along the deal tables beneath the mellow light of six kerosene lamps. The villagers were accustomed to cluster here after nightfall, being made timorous by the deafening insect choruses and unbroken blacknesses of the early-summer countryside. They were not convinced that the million-piped shrieking which went on in the meadows and woods was only the voices of "bugs," and no one could tell them that the howling from an adjacent swamp was done by little green frogs and not by scaly dragons and crocodiles.

"Myself I could not holler so loud!" protested Pincus Rubin incredulously. "A bullfrog? *Might* you mean it is a *bull!* It is better Officer Malarkey watches with his pistol for that bullfrog!"

"A farrmer fellow brought a fly into the gar-rage to-day and asked me to fit it with new shoes," said M'Candliss soberly.

"Shoes on a fly?" scoffed Pincus.

"Yes, Mister-r R-Rubin," said the Scotchman. "It was a horsefly!"

"A *horse*fly!" jeered Pincus. And in a moment of silence he listened to the bellowing in the morass behind his requisitioned shop. "Who ever heard of horseflies? Am I right, Miss Tipstaff?"

"Horseflies, certainly, Mr. Rubin," said the school-teacher, frowning at such masculine childishness. "Mr. Lafflin wishes to tell us something!"

"As I told you this afternoon," said Jack, rising before the encouraging nudge of Sarah Gillespie, "the owner of this village wants seventy-five thousand dollars for it. Most of you agreed that you'd like to live here, but it was out of the question to raise the money."

"I couldn't live here," said an elderly man named Peebles. "I like it here first rate but I can't give up my job in the trust company. It's all very well for you gentlemen who can take up stores and such."

"That goes for me too," said a voice from behind a glowing pipe.

"Me, too—worse luck!"

"That can be ar-ranged," said the garage keeper. "I should be verra glad to be of ser-rvice, on some properr business terrms."

"It takes the Scotch," said Costello. "They're the greatest philanthropists in the world—on some proper business terms."

"Aye, Mister-r Costello," accepted M'Candliss equably. "And still and all they're better than some folks that don't

care what the business is so long as they can make the dollar-r."

"Mr. M'Candliss means," interposed Jack hastily, throwing himself into the ancient breach that yawns between the two main sects of the Gael, "that he is willing to run a bus over to the nearest station of the New York Central. That's five miles away but I think there are enough of you who will want to commute to pay his expense. After you've paid the five or ten cents he must charge you, and have paid for your commutation ticket, you'll find you'll still save money by living here rather than in the city at the present rents. And then I have another proposition that I will go into with you later which will assure Mr. M'Candliss a nice profit on his bus.

"But at present we're concerned only with securing living quarters for all of us. Several of us have talked it over and we think it would be the right thing to form a company to buy the village, a company in which every tenant of the Tuileries will be a shareholder and which will be genuinely one-hundred-per-cent coöperative! The old charter of the village has, of course, been given up, but we're assured by Counselor Mansfield, who is one of us, that we can have the charter restored on application. He assures us that the cost of incorporating a company to take over the property will not be more than fifty dollars, and he will make out the certificate to send to Albany the first thing Monday morning.

"Now as to the financing.

"On the strength of your subscription of seven thousand dollars to-day I have secured a contract for the purchase of the village from the owner, Eli Kipp. Relying on your subscription I got the money to-day from Mr. Hopper, the president of Felix J. Hopper, Inc., and I've paid the seven thousand over to Mr. Kipp. The contract is taken in the name of Felix J. Hopper, Inc., and it will be assigned to your coöperative company as soon as the same is formed and the seven thousand dollars repaid. All that Felix J. Hopper, Inc., wants in return for the courtesy is the exclusive right to act as your broker in all your real-estate transactions.

"You won't have to put your hands into your pockets again. The village was visited two weeks ago by a Mr. Goldfarb who is the representative of the Cosmopolitan Finance Corporation. He agreed with Mr. Brower, the prospective buyer, to lend one hundred thousand dollars on this property. I saw Mr. Goldfarb this afternoon and he says the offer is still good."

"Tell us that again," requested an incredulous voice. "The property is to be bought for seventy-five thousand and then mortgaged for a *hundred* thousand?"

"Exactly," said Jack. "The property was not worth more than seventy-five thousand dollars while it lay vacant but it's worth a sight more with all you people here! We can understand that without going quite all the way with our friends the single taxers. It's the history of any new town in the West, where the land might be bought for a dollar an acre one day and sold for a thousand per lot the next morning after the people had arrived! The difference here is that the profit is going to be taken by the people in coöperation, and not cabbaged by clever speculators."

"I would suggest," said young Mr. Mansfield, restive under holding his legal tongue while so much good talk was passing, "that we get ourselves into some proper shape so that we'll be able to arrive at binding decisions. We'll take it that this is a meeting of proposed stockholders. I propose Mr. Lafflin as temporary chairman."

There was a rumble of assent.

"Now we want three directors to sign the certificate of the real-estate corporation."

"Any nominations?" asked the red-headed chairman.

And Mr. M'Candliss, Mr. Costello, and Mr. Rubin were railroaded into authority by popular acclamation—the thing being really done, of course—as such things are always done—by prearrangement of a clique.

"We have with us here to-night," said Mr. Costello, rising promptly in response to a lifted eyebrow of the chairmain, "a gentleman who is well renowned in the world of financial affairs for his integrity, ability, experience, learning, justice—and a good sport and a square shooter! A gentleman, gentlemen, who has got all sorts of knowledge about managing governments, such as getting in the taxes, getting out the vote, giving contracts to his friends and a good jolly to the others. And we're all his friends in this instance, what I mean, so we're all in right! A gentleman, gentlemen, who has spent a long and not unfruitful career in the service of the people and the American

workingman and the department of finance of the city of New York! A gentleman, gentlemen, who is strong for Washington and Jefferson, and the best traditions of the party——"

Mr. Costello was launching into an excellent address, but, unfortunately, he felt obliged by the best traditions of public speaking to pause at this point and drink a formal glass of water. During this decorous interval the envious Mr. M'Candliss spoke up and nipped the address in its bud.

"I nominate Mr. Randall Gillespie for president of the village of Teneyck!"

And, while Mr. Costello puffed and reddened with suppressed oratory Mr. Gillespie zoomed into office. A board of trustees and a village clerk were chosen, and the city fathers were constituted complete. Mr. Mansfield was made corporation counsel, Miss Tipstaff became president of the school board, and the Reverend Storer—as chaplain—closed the meeting with a word of prayer.

"Miss President!" called Pincus Rubin, pursuing Miss Tipstaff.

"Yes, Mr. Rubin?"

"I want you should write me two letters, Miss President, please. One to Sem Rosen in New York—'Dear Sem: Shame for you, Sem! Two t'ousand dollars for mine store in New York? *Pfui!* It is better we don't talk about it and make bad friends, Sem. *Positivel* nothing doing, Sem!' And then, under you put—like hours later—'P. M. I change my mind, Sem. Send me bill of sale. and check, *at wunst!*' That is what I mean, Miss President. In English I ain't got it the words, see? You should write a nice letter to mean like that, see?"

"I shall be very glad to oblige you, Mr. Rubin. And what is the other letter?"

"The other letter," said the little tailor showing his big teeth in a commingled snarl and grin, "is to them people that owns the Tuileries. What I mean is like this: 'Gentlemen: I should buy mine apartment or go jump myself into the street, ain't it? To you I tell something, you crook, you! You should take your apartment and go jump yourself into the river! Coffee money I wouldn't give you for your whole house, you liar, you! *Oi,* such a robber that you are!"

"But, really, Mr. Rubin," protested Miss Tipstaff. "While I sympathize sincerely with your sense of grievance against this conscienceless landlord, I feel that it would ill become a person of my official standing—corresponding, as it does, to that of president of the board of education in New York City—to indulge in anything verging however distantly on scurrility. I should think that the demands of the situation would be adequately met by a curt but dignified refusal of the request to purchase—coupled, perhaps, with a few dispassionate and forward-looking reflections on the folly of greed, with particular reference to the financial loss which it must in this case entail."

Pincus grunted, unconvinced. "To Sem Rosen you shall write such a passionate letter, Miss President, but to this *goniff* landlord another letter yet I want! I guess it is better I ask Mr. Costello, ain't it?"

Up the road, on the porch of a pretty six-room cottage, sat President Gillespie. With wide eyes he was staring into thick and blanketing darkness, but he was looking none the less into a large and beautiful garden, riotous with geraniums, splendidly exotic with lemon trees in tubs, stately with numerous rubber plants. He was pottering about in that garden which was right there between the porch and the road.

Jack and Sarah, standing at the rehung gate, saw the president's pipe glowing excitedly against the gloom.

"I'm taking that store next to the garage for the local office of the Hopper organization," explained Jack. "We're going to divide most of the hundred and sixty acres in the villa plots and sell them off to people wanting homes. The city office will dig up the prospects and ship them out here and M'Candliss will pick them up at the station. You see, we'll be able to guarantee transportation, so that they'll be able to get into New York from here under an hour!"

"I think that little church is awful pretty," said Sarah. "Can't you see how nice it will be when it is repainted and a bed of elephant ears planted in front? And they are going to bluestone the path, so it will be a real pleasure to walk into it."

"A hundred and sixty acres," said Jack, "will cut up nicely into three or four hundred plots! There are sixteen lots in an acre unimproved and twelve when you take out sixty-foot streets. And a sixty-foot roadbed is too wide in the country, don't you think so? Pshaw, forty feet is wide enough. And then supposing you allow four full lots to each plot—well, you have four hundred

—easy! Now we ought to get at least a thousand dollars per plot, making four hundred thousand dollars, and five per cent on four hundred thousand dollars is twenty thousand—not to mention the resales, and the charges for building loans, and the renting of completed houses, and all that. And if it goes big we haven't got to stop inside the village limits. Why, there'll be work enough in this development to keep me busy for the rest of my life, and worth while, too!"

"This is the last day of June," said Sarah. "But I'm not so stuck on June weddings, are you, Jack? It's only a superstition, when you come right down to it. 'Wedded in May —Soon Fade Away.' 'Wedded in June—Separate Soon.' What is it they say about July?"

"I don't know, Sarah. But, listen!"

"I guess July is all right," murmured Sarah. "It stands to reason!"

"Now, on this sale of the village the half of the commission coming to me will be eighteen hundred and seventy-five dollars. Why, if I stick that away and keep going as I expect to it won't be any time before we'll have enough money to get married on —not more than a year or so, Sarah. Now, just supposing we sell a hundred villa plots a year and get the placing of the building loans—and you want to remember we got a monopoly of this good thing——"

"I always did adore a country wedding," said Sarah. "It's so pretty and it's more like getting married than it is in the city, where you go into the Municipal Building and stand in line for a license and nobody knows if you went in to get married or to swear off taxes. I always say that standing in line like that is perfectly horrid! Give me a country wedding any time, but especially in July!"

"Yes, yes. But as I was saying—on my new arrangement with Hopper I'm to have this territory exclusively, including not only the village of Teneyck, but ten miles roundabout; and there's some very live stuff in that territory! I figure that in a very few years——"

"I was just wondering, Jack," she breathed, touching his arm.

"Just wondering—what?" he asked, almost crossly.

"I was just wondering who would be the first couple to be married in that pretty little church. The first of *us*, I mean."

"Why, Sarah, I suppose it will be you and I."

"Oh, Jack!" she breathed, startled. He saw her shining eyes. "Do you think we can get ready so soon?"

"Of course we can, Sarah. That is—how soon?"

"By this day two weeks. I just heard from Mrs. Dibble that pastor Storer is going to marry Miss Tipstaff two weeks from Monday. We will have to hurry dreadfully, Jack. But if you really want me, Jack, why ——"

"Why, of course I want you, my angel," he urged, putting his arms about her and instantly feeling all his doubts and hesitations leave him. "I want you right away, dearest. I know it is a shock to you to ask you to get married on such short notice, but after all we've been keeping company for three years now, haven't we? We'll get married right away, won't we, Sarah?"

"It does seem so awfully—unexpected," she whispered against his lapels. "I never dreamed of getting married so suddenly, sweetheart. But, after all, after three years of an engagement, nobody could blame us if we hurried—just a little, Jack—could they?"

There was a silence. It was broken by the voice of Constable Malarkey, passing in the darkness toward the cottage wherein were tucked Mrs. Malarkey and six little Malarkeys.

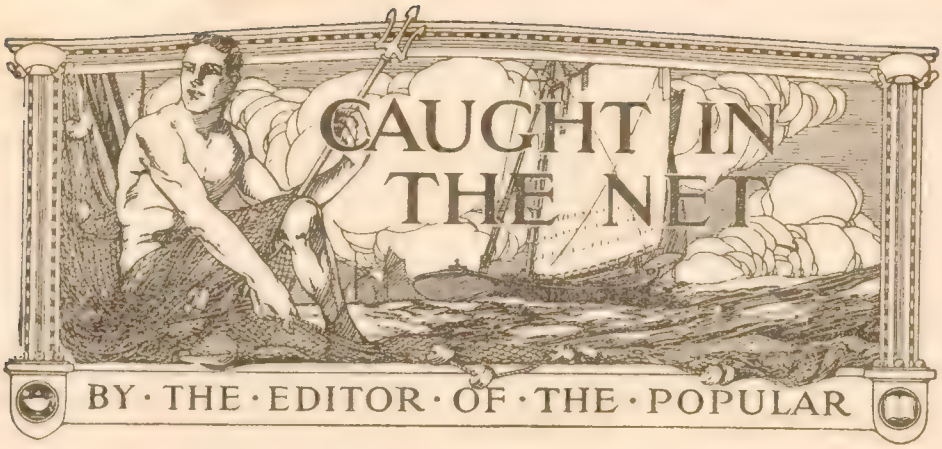
"Ten o'clock, and aa-aa-all's well!" chanted the constable, following faithfully the ritual prescribed for him by Miss Tipstaff who had a book which told about such matters.

*Look for more stories by Mr. McMorrow in future issues.*

## HIS FAVORITE INVENTOR

THE discussion in the smoking car had turned to great inventors. One man thought Edison the greatest of them all; another admired Bell; a third chose Henry Ford.

"All very vell," spoke up a little fellow from behind a big black cigar; "but, chentlemun, the man dot invented interest vas no slouch!"




## THE EVOLUTION OF FAITH

IS the old again to give place to the new in the faith to which men pin their hope? Are the living convictions of to-day to be the immolated dogmas of to-morrow? Judging by recent emanations from distinguished pulpits the question is anything but academic. If we are to credit the opinions of a large and apparently increasing group of clergymen whose standing in the vocation of religion entitles their pronouncements to a serious ear there exists a very large, and very considerable, section of the lay public which appeals to the church for a recasting, a reinterpretation of the old teachings. A hasty examination of this condition may breed alarm. In many quarters it has bred alarm. Warning voices have sounded announcing an assault on the foundations of religion. But perhaps there is no real menace. The history of religion indicates, indeed, that there is no menace. The faiths of the past were not dogmatically immutable. They conformed to the mental and spiritual compass of the communities that served them. As the compass of their congregations widened the dogmas of the faiths developed and evolved. Old dogmas were discarded. New dogmas were embraced. But the fundamentals of faith remained. New creeds and sects were born but not a new religion. Religion weathered every storm of dogmatic controversy and dissension, unshaken on the bed rock of belief in the existence of a Divine Purpose and the immortality of the human soul.

In considering the import of the present-day tendencies toward evolution in the dogmas of the modern church it is of vital interest to recall that in the past the periods of theological upheaval were not periods of low religious vitality. They were periods of increased religious fervor, on the contrary. They came either when the heightened intellectual powers of a community stimulated thought in the direction of the spiritual or when the physical conditions under which men existed appeared insupportable and they turned with the intensity of despair to seek added comfort and strength from the faith they professed. Under these conditions leaders arose who taught the faith a little differently, a great deal better, showing how through revision and broadening of the old dogmas the newer spiritual aspirations might be satisfied.

History does not confirm the claim that the mutterings and mumblings of dissatisfaction within the church to-day are the sign of an agnostic-minded generation seeking to throw off the yoke of faith and stampede heedlessly in the pleasant pastures of spiritual license. It indicates rather that we are on the threshold of a religious revitalization; that far from being repudiated and deserted the old faith will emerge from the threatened upheaval, if upheaval there be, unchanged as ever in its essentials but reborn to added power in the widened scope of its human contacts.

## THE LAST PROBLEM

MR. FORD'S gasoline carryall has brought the country to the city and the city to the country; radio has made every farmhouse and city apartment a potential show shop; spooks speaking from the farther bank have convinced many that heaven is as dull as Main Street at dinner time; adrenalin seems to make going there a mere matter of choice; this year's skirts show that fashion covers a multitude of shins; the airplane laughs at distance and Professor Einstein sneers at space; a New York newspaper has succeeded in printing the day's news in a form that makes it possible to read it all in ten minutes; other newspapers have succeeded in printing it in a form that makes it inadvisable to read it at all; the movies have wished Broadway manners and Fifth Avenue styles on every town on the map—even a large-scale map; Mr. Jess Willard has shown that it is never too late to bend the other fellow; Mr. William Jennings Bryan says that evolution ain't so; Mr. H. G. Wells says that it is; a young woman has succeeded in dancing for*—— hours without a stop; the Antisaloon League has proved that the men who wrote the Declaration of Independence were suffering from delusions; the bootleggers have demonstrated the freedom of the seas; the League of Nations has made war impossible and inevitable; Mr. Harding has displayed for us the beauties of normalcy and Lenine and Trotsky the beauties of abnormalcy; everything worth doing has been done and an answer found to every one of civilization's problems except this one:

What is a safe and convenient way of getting rid of used safety-razor blades?

*See to-day's paper for latest record.

## HAIL! A. MAN!

ENDURANCE is the style this season. We read in our morning paper that Mr. Somebody of Somewhere has broken the world's dance-endurance record by a matter of several hours, quite a few minutes, and an important cluster of seconds. We learn, to boot, that Mrs. Thingummy of Somewhere Else is under observation in a hospital following her amazing exploit of dealing a greater number of bridge hands, faster, and for a longer period than anybody recorded in the history of the world and pathology. We are further informed, perhaps, that Miss Hoosis of Yet Another Place, having utterly and completely broken down six specially reënforced typewriters, has commenced the wreck of a seventh and is now entering on her fourth consecutive day of a scheduled six-day manuscript race without any signs of weakening. Professor Grumph of Elsewhere College it is reported is still awake and reading feebly in the eleventh volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica, having passed the world's record mark of ten tomes at a sitting without batting an eye. But we look in vain for any inspiring chronicle about the endurance performance of a certain Mr. Average Man of Anywhere who, in our opinion, is the Daddy-of-them-all when it comes to endurance.

Consider what the average man puts up with. Year after year he endures the profiteers, the reformers, the collectors of internal revenue, the politicians. When inflation booms Big Business he patiently pays the water bill. When deflation stagnates the country he stolidly hunts a job. Undaunted he wallows in the troughs of crime waves, graft waves, and strike waves. He bears the burden of a five-thousand-dollar family on a two-thousand-dollar stipend. Poverty, plague and disappointment cannot put him out. From pistol to tape his life is one long obstacle race. Yet he carries on, regardless of how he is outdistanced, until he breasts the finish line.

Newspapers may feature the three-day dancers, and the fifty-mile baby-carriage pushers, and the million-word typists, and the coast-to-coast flyers, but our choice for endurance champion is Mr. A. Man. He is the past all-around master, the peerless, unchallenged record holder in the game of universal fortitude. We yield him the palm!

## A COMMON ERROR

A FRIEND of ours has decided that golf is all very well as an old man's pastime but that for a husky, red-blooded, he-man like himself the proper sporting hobby should be moose hunting. He plans to fare into the "trackless North" next moose season and annex a collection of "mighty antlered heads" with which to decorate his den and impress his circle of acquaintances. Meanwhile he is preparing himself by practicing on a target with a twenty-two subcaliber rifle. He uses a moose for a target—a moose of cardboard and printer's ink which he tacks against a tree. The target is the creation of a sporting-goods concern. It is drawn to scale, shows the vulnerable portions of the pictured quarry, and bears the legend, "This target at fifty feet is the equivalent of a moose at two hundred yards."

When our friend, who is a highly successful business man, showed us his target and we read that inscription we laughed aloud. He looked hurt.

"What are you laughing at?" he demanded.

For answer we asked him a question. "You are a contracting architect," we said. "You went to a technical college for four years where you were supposed to learn all a man needs to know to plan and boss a job of house building. In effect your college told you, 'This four-year course is the equivalent of a complete practical experience in planning and building houses.' But were you fit to build a house when you graduated?"

He got our point. "Well," he admitted, "I might have built a house, all right, but it would have cost somebody a pile of money."

"When you get through your course of shooting paper mooses," we said, "it is still going to cost you a lot of ammunition to kill your first moose."

The man who said, "Knowledge is power," didn't mean book knowledge. He meant book knowledge plus the knowledge that comes only to the man who has worked on the job—experience. The moose hunter doesn't learn his skill on a rifle range; he gets it in the woods. The doctor doesn't learn his craft in a lecture room; he gets it in a hospital. The lawyer can't convince a jury until he has found out how in court. Success is not the result of theory. It is made up of about one part theory to two parts practice. If you want to be a moose hunter it is good sense to spend one season with a paper target. But don't believe the legend that says your target at fifty feet is the equivalent of a moose at two hundred yards. After one season with the target you may find that it will require at least two seasons in the woods before you bring home the "antlered head"—unless, of course, you let your guide do your shooting for you.

## THE AIR LINE OF DEFENSE

A RECENT statement of Major General Patrick, commanding the air service of the United States army, conveys the startling information that the aërial arm of our national defense organization on land is allowed only one thousand sixty-one officers under existing law. This sounds bad enough, on the face of it, but it is really even worse than it sounds.

It means in effect that the United States could not, in case of war with a well-prepared opponent, send a single army corps into the field with an adequate complement of aërial troops. It means that the United States, as a matter of fact, has no combatant aërial arm at all, but the skeleton elements of a training organization only.

Here is General Patrick's condensed survey of our military situation in the air:

"After assigning small air-service components entirely inadequate for their proper defense to the Philippines, Hawaii, and Panama, and to the centers for peace-time training in this country, there remains only sufficient personnel to maintain in the United States, *at greatly reduced strength*, one pursuit, one attack, and one bombardment group, and the observation squadrons in each corps area. How greatly the strength of these organizations is reduced below their needs is evidenced by the plight

of the pursuit group. Approved tables of organization for a pursuit group call for 101 officers and 735 men. It has been possible to assign only fifteen officers and 600 men to our single pursuit group, the only aggregation of fighting planes in the United States for our defense from an air attack."

The full impact of this statement does not strike home unless the relationship between the "pursuit" branch of military aviation and the other branches—observation, bombing, and attack—is understood. The fact is that in the conduct of modern warfare, where the possession of adequate aërial effectives by both sides is presupposed, the relative aërial strength of the contending armies must be measured in terms of pursuit airplanes almost exclusively. No matter what an army's strength may be in planes of the observation, bombing, or attack types it cannot project and carry out aërial operations of any type unless it is appreciably equal to the enemy in pursuit effectives. On the other hand, an army equipped with nothing but pursuit planes in adequate number could control the situation and reduce its opponent to aërial impotence from the very outset.

The pursuit plane is the key—the only key—to the military situation in the air. It is the active fighting element of aërial warfare. Other types of planes are only auxiliaries. It is to the air force as a whole what the soldier with his rifle is to the army. Its mission is to attack, destroy, or drive off the enemy air affectives and to clear the way for the operations of the heavier, slower, more or less defenseless types of aircraft.

This being so it appears, from General Patrick's survey of the situation, that for immediate combat purposes the United States has practically no air force at all. Fifteen pursuit planes are less than enough to form a single combat squadron. They could not, for a single day, hold their own against a well-equipped enemy on a twenty-mile front. They would be destroyed or driven down before the sun had set on their first day's activities. And the air would be closed to the rest of our pathetically inadequate air force from that time on. In the absence of protection from friendly fighting craft our observation, bombing and attack planes would be annihilated by enemy pursuit before they could cross the hostile lines. They might just as well not exist, for all the good they could do.

In the past we have always counted on the navy to hold an enemy at bay while we prepared our other arms to come to grips. But the situation has changed. The navy cannot control the air. Our first line of defense to-day is not only on the sea but in the clouds. We cannot afford to leave the defense of that vast region to the forlorn hope of fifteen airplanes.

## POPULAR TOPICS

THERE soon will be another star in the American flag if the people of southern Alaska have their way. There is a strong sentiment in the Territory that the part of Alaska lying south of the arctic circle and east of the one hundred and fifty-second meridian should be admitted to the Union as a full-fledged State. Colonel William B. Greeley, chief forester of the United States, advocates this action in a report to the secretary of agriculture, saying that this portion of the Territory has the economic wealth and stable, law-abiding population that entitles it to self-government within the Union. Colonel Greeley also says that the department of agriculture's assistance in building up an export lumber trade and establishing a pulp-and-paper industry, and in building woods roads, and a decentralized local administration, are contributing to the prosperity of the Territory and helping to improve business and living conditions.

OUR export business last year amounted to over three and three-quarter billion dollars, more than a third being in manufactured goods ready for consumption. Raw materials taken from our natural resources were the next largest item, amounting to nine hundred and eighty-one million dollars. Foodstuffs partly or wholly

manufactured were third, with a value of over half a billion dollars, while crude foodstuffs and food animals exported were valued at somewhat less than a half billion.

IF Representative Yenter of the Iowa State legislature ever runs for president he should get the vote of every traveling man, for he is the father of a bill introduced into the legislature of his State requiring all hotels in Iowa to furnish ninety-six-inch sheets. Other measures proposed by him forbid hotels making their patrons sleep—or try to sleep—on straw mattresses and using cracked dishes in their dining rooms. Some day we may see political banners reading: "Vote for Yenter and a good night's rest."

THE new course of the Winged Foot Golf Club—a branch of the New York Athletic Club—is equipped with the very latest thing in golf-course dingbats. A telephone system that will enable any player on the course to be reached quickly and without disturbing other golfers is to be installed. A standard supporting a telautographic device is to be installed near every tee, and a flashing signal will attract the players' attention when any one is wanted on the phone. This innovation would be a boon to wives who want to get dinner over with before ten o'clock—except for one thing. If the player called doesn't want to answer he can go calmly on his way.

THE Western Union is trying—successfully—to induce its messenger boys to "snap it up." In New York City the boys are being enrolled in military companies which will be drilled by regular-army sergeants. In this way the company hopes to convert the boys to the military virtues of precision, good carriage, neatness and "snapping into it." If the scheme proves successful in New York it will be extended to all cities where the company has large numbers of boys in its service.

THAT the metric system of measurement will sooner or later be adopted officially in the United States is the forecast made in the annual report of the Metric Association. A referendum on the subject to be held by the National Council of Chambers of Commerce is expected to speed the day when meters and millimeters will make feet and inches old-fashioned. The system now is in use in technical colleges and some manufacturing concerns have adopted it. Since the meter was made the obligatory unit of measurement in France in 1801 the system has been made compulsory in most of the countries of Europe and in some of the South American republics and has been legalized in the United States, Great Britain and many other countries.

FORTUNE telling isn't such a cinch as we've always thought it. More is needed as stock in trade than a sign, some red curtains and a mysterious expression. The thoroughly equipped fortune teller—take it from the *Central China Post*, as we do—should be proficient in—among many others—the following subjects: Psychomancy, crystallomancy psychomachy, aruspiciny, capnomancy, rhabdomancy, anixomancy, sortilege, anthroposcopy and Bletonism.

UNCLE SAM'S specialists in iron millinery seem to be as keen on changing fashions as the rest of the people who lay down the law on "what the well-dressed man will wear." The upside-down-soup-bowl-model tin derby that was the style in A. E. F. circles a few years ago is as much out of fashion as grandmother's bonnet. The present trend is toward the coal-scuttle model affected by the Germans during what has been called "the franker part of the present war."

# Ocean Tramps

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

*Author of "The Garden of God," "Me and Slane," Etc.*

**The ingenuous Mr. Harman and his partner acquire riches and more trouble.**

## II.—THE CHOICE.

WHAT would you do were you to find yourself on a sixty-ton ketch off the middle coast of Chile with a crew of six Kanakas, less than ten days' provisions on board, no money to speak of, and a healthy and lively dread of touching at a Chile port?

That was the exact position of Mr. William Harman and his friend "Bud" Davis one bright morning on board the ketch *Douro* and thirty miles nor'west of Buenodiaz—about.

The *Douro* was heading west-nor'west, the morning was perfect, the Pacific calm, and Billy seated on the hatch cover was expressing the opinion that running straight was the best course to adopt in a world where reefs were frequent and sharks abundant.

"No," said he, "runnin' crooked don't pay, nohow. There ain't enough softies about to make it pay—ain't enough mugs about, as I've told you more'n once. Happy I was on Papaleeta beach and then you comes along that night and says, 'Let's take Penhill's ship,' says you. 'There she lays, the *Araya,* sixty-ton schooner, and he drinkin' himself blind at the club and he can't touch us,' says you, 'for he's mortal afraid of what I know about him. It's as safe as cheeses,' says you, and off we put and out we took her—safe as cheeses, seein' Penhill couldn't touch us, weren't we?"

"Oh, close up," said Davis.

"I ain't rubbin' it in. I'm just tellin' you. Nobody couldn't touch us, and bold we put into Buenodiaz, reckonin' to sell her on the hoof, cargo and all, and she worth ten thousand dollars if she was worth a jitney. And then what happens? Perira offers to buy her, cargo and all, and while you were dickerin' with him his daughter hands you that yarn about the *Douro* havin' a million dollars in bar gold on board of her and what does we do?" Mr. Harman's voice rose a tone or two. "We leaves ten thousand dollars' worth of ship and cargo and rows over to this dough dish, boards her, lifts the hook, cracks on sail and puts out to find nuthin' in them boxes but sand an' pebbles—half a ton of beach, that's what them turkey bustards has landed on us in swop for a schooner and cargo worth ten thousand dollars if she was piled, let alone ridin' at her moorings in Buenodiaz harbor."

"Well" said Davis, "you needn't shout it. You were in it as well as me. I guess we were both suckers, but we haven't come off empty handed. We've got a ship under our feet. But we're in a bad way, I'll admit.

Can't you see the game that's been played on us? This hooker is worth four thousand dollars any day in the week. They've let us run off with her—they set her as a trap for us—but they'll want her back. If we put into any Chile port we'll be sure nabbed and put to work in the salt mines while those blighters will get their ship back."

"Sure," said Harman.

"But we ain't goin' to."

"How d'ye mean?"

"We ain't goin' to put into no Chile port." Davis sighed, rose, went below and fetched up the top of one of the gold boxes, then with a stump of pencil he drew a rough map of South America, indicating the appalling coast line of Chile while Harman looked on open-mouthed and open-eyed.

"There you are," said the map maker. "A hundred thousand miles long and nothing but seaboard and there we are—nothing but the Horn to the south and Bolivia to the north and the Bolivians are hand in fist with the Chileans and moreover there's sure to be gunboats out to look for us. That's why I'm holding on west; we've got to get to sea and trust in Providence."

"Well," said Harman, "I reckon if Providence is our stand-by and if it made Chile same's your map shows her, we're done for. There ain't no sense in it; no, sir, there ain't no sense in a country all foreshore stringed out like that, with scarce room for a bathin' machine, and them darned Bolivians at one end of it and the Horn at the other. It ain't playin' it fair on a man. It ain't more nor less than a trap, that's what I call it; it ain't more nor less than——"

"Oh, shut up," said Davis. "You're wasting your wind. We're in it and we've got to get out. Now I've just given you our position; we're running near due west into open sea, with only ten days' grub, nothing to strike but Easter Island and the mail line from Frisco to Montevideo. We've the chance to pick up grub from a ship; failing that either we'll eat the Kanakas or the Kanakas will eat us. I'm not funning. How do you take it? Shall us hold on or push down to Valparaiso and take our gruel?"

"What did you say those mines were?" asked Harman.

"Which mines?"

"Those mines the Chile blighters put chaps like us to work in."

"Salt mines."

Mr. Harman meditated for a moment. "Well," said he at last, "I reckon I'll take my chance on the Kanakas."

II.

The *Douro* had nothing about her of any use for navigation but the rudder and the compass in the binnacle and the telltale compass fixed in the roof of the saloon. Perira, when he had baited her as a trap for the unfortunates to run away with, had left nothing of value. He and the beauties working with him reckoned to get her back, no doubt, as Davis had indicated, but they knew that the fox sometimes manages to escape, carrying the trap with him, so they left nothing to grieve about except the hull, sticks, strings, canvas, bunk bedding and a few tin plates and cooking implements.

So she was sailing pretty blind with nothing to smell at but the north pole—to use Davis' words as he spat over the side at the leaping blue sea while Harman, leaning beside him on the rail, concurred.

The one bright spot in the whole position was the thousand dollars or so of the *Araya's* ship money still safe in Davis' pocket.

It proved its worth some six days later when, close on the San Francisco-Montevideo mail line, they flagged a big freighter and got provisions enough to last them for a month. Then "more feeling than feet under them," to use Harman's expression, they pushed along protected by the gods of Marco Polo and the early navigators, untrusting in a compass that might be untrustable, through blazing days and nights of stars, smoking—they had got tobacco from the freighter—yarning, lazing and putting their faith in luck.

"Anyhow," said the philosophic Harman, "we ain't got no chronometer to be slippin' cogs or goin' wrong, nor no damn glass to be floppin' about and frightenin' a chap's gizzard out of him with indications of cyclones and such, nor no charts to be thumbin', nor no sextan' to be squintin' at the sun with. I tell you, Bud, I ain't never felt freer than this. I reckon it's the same with money. Come to think of it, money's no catch when all's said and done with, what between banks bustin' and sharks layin' for a chap—not to speak of sore heads an' brown tongues in the mornin'. Money buys trouble—that's all I've ever seen of it and it's the same all through."

"Well, that wasn't your song on the beach

at Papaleete," said Davis, "and seems to me you weren't backward in making a grab for that gold at Buenodiaz."

"Maybe I wasn't," replied the other, and the conversation wilted while on the tepid wind from the dark-blue sea came the sound of the bow wash, answered by the lazy creak of block and cordage.

No longer steering west, but northward toward the line, the *Douro* brought them nights of more velvety darkness and more tremendous stars, seas more impossibly blue, till one dawn that looked like a flock of red flamingoes escaping across an horizon of boiling gold. Taute, on the lookout, cried: "Land!" And the great sea leaping up astern stripped the curtain away with a laugh and showed them coconut trees beyond a broken sea, and beyond the coconut trees a mist-blue stillness incredibly wonderful and beautiful, till in a flash, vagueness vanishing, a great lagoon blazed out with the gulls circling above it gold and rose and marble-flake white.

Before this miracle Harman stood unimpressed.

"We'd have been butt into the damn thing in another hour if the sun hadn't lifted," said he, "unless maybe the noise of the reef would have fended us off—hook to it!"

They could hear it coming up against the wind, a long low rumble like the sound of a far-off train, and now as the *Douro* drew in they could see the foam spouting as the flood tide raced through the passage broad before them and showing the vast harbor of the lagoon.

"The opening seems all right," said Davis.

"Deep enough to float a battleship," replied the other, "and no sign of rocks in it. Shove her in."

The *Douro* did not require any shoving. Driven by the wind and tide she came through the break like a gull and as the great lagoon spread before them they could see the whole vast inner beach with one sweep of the eye.

It was an oval-shaped atoll, maybe four miles from rim to rim at its broadest part, heavy here and there with groves of palm and jack-fruit trees and showing a village of grass-roofed houses by the trees on the northern beach, where on the blinding white sands canoes were lying. From this beach a boat was just putting off.

"They've sighted us," said Davis.

"Seems so," replied Harman running forward to superintend the fellows who were getting the anchor ready while the *Douro*, shaking the wind out of her sails, lost way and the hook fell in six-fathom water, the rumble of the chain coming back in faintest echoes from the painted shore.

The boat drew on. It was manned by Kanakas and steered by a white man—a huge man with a broad and red and bulbous face who came on board leg-over-rail without a word of greeting, gazed around him with a pair of protruding light blue eyes, and then finding his voice, addressed Harman.

"Where the blazes have *you* blown in from?" asked the stranger.

## III.

"Gentlemen," said Clayton, for Clayton was his name and they were all down below sampling a bottle of rum wangled by the ingenuous Harman out of the purser of the freighter, "gentlemen, I'm not divin' into your business—a ship in ballast without charts or chronometer, not knowing where she is and not willin' to say where she comes from, may be on the square and may be not."

"We ain't," said Harman bluntly.

"That bein' so," said Clayton, quite unmoved, "we can deal without circumluting round the show and get to the point, which is this: I'm wantin' your ship."

"Spread yourself," said Davis, "and tip the bottle."

Clayton obeyed.

"I'm willin' to buy her of you," said he, "lock, stock, barrel and Kanakas, no questions asked, no questions answered, only terms."

"What's your terms?" asked Harman.

Clayton raised his head. The wind had shifted and blew through the open port. It brought with it a faint, awful, subtle, utterly undescribable perfume. Far above the vulgar world of stenches, almost psychic, it floated around them while Harman spat and Davis considered the stranger attentively and anew.

"Oysters," said Davis.

"Rotting on the outer beach," said Clayton. "That's my meaning and my terms. Gentlemen, if you ain't plumb fools the smell of them oysters will be as a leadin' light to bring you a fortune as big as my own."

"Open the can," said Harman.

"Which I will," replied the other. "I'm plain-sailin' Jim, I am, and I don't want to beat round no bushes and it's just this way, gents. The hull of this lagoon is a virgin oyster patch full of oysters, pearl breedin' and sound, with no foot-and-mouth disease to them. Oolong-Javal is the Kanaka name of the atoll and it's on no charts. No, sir, it's a sealed lagoon and I struck it two years ago runnin' from Sydney to Valparaiso, master of the *Sea Hawk*, with a chink crew and a cargo of chow truck. Put in here for water, spotted the oyster shop and kept my head shut. Found orders at Valparaiso to ballast and get on to Callao, but I didn't go to no Callao. I cut loose, fired the mate as a drunk and incapable, which he was, laid out the ship's money on divin' dresses and a pump, hawked back here, landed the equipment and started in on the pearling."

"And the chinks?" asked Harman.

"Comin' to them, they curled up and died of eatin' the lagoon fish in the poisonous season. Couldn't keep them off it—you know what chinks are. And as for the hooker, why sinkin' gets rid of a lot of trouble and I took her outside the reef and drilled her."

"Well, you are a one," said Harman, shocked, yet intrigued and vaguely admiring.

"I don't say that I'm not," replied Clayton. "I reckon we're all in the same boat and plain speaking is best among gentlemen, but cuttin' all that, let's get down to tin tacks. I've been working a year and I haven't skinned more than a patch of the beds. All the same I've made my pile and I want to enjoy it. I want to have my fun and if you're willing I'll swap the location and the mining rights for this hooker and her crew. I want to get home and home's Kusai Island up north in the Marshalls—and that's what's waitin' for me and has been waitin' for me three years."

He took a photograph from his pocket and handed it to the others. It was the photo of a Kanaka girl under a palm tree on a blazing beach.

"Oh, Lord, a petticoat!" said Harman in a doleful voice at this sight of ill omen. "A petticoat!"

"There ain't no petticoat about her," said Clayton—as indeed there was not—"unless the missionaries have been gettin' at her with their tomfoolery. Oti is her name, and there she sits waitin' for me, which if she isn't and has gone and got spliced, I reckon I'll bust her husband. Well, gents, which is it to be for you—floatin' round loose in this cockroach trap or a hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls to be took for the working?"

"And how are we to get away, supposing we stick here and pearl?" asked Davis.

"That's not for me to say," replied Clayton. "Something will blow along most likely and take you off, or you can rig up a canoe and make for the Paumotus. I'm just offerin' the deal which many a man would jump at, more especial as this old ketch of yours seems to smell of lost property. I ain't insinuating—I'm only hintin'."

Davis swallowed the suggestion without sign of taking offense. Then he said: "I'll step on deck with my friend Harman and have a word with him. I won't be more'n five minutes."

On deck, Harman suddenly clapped himself on the head. "We've left that ballyhoo alone with the rum bottle," said he.

"Never mind," said Davis, "we're better dry. Now get your nose down to this business while I turn the handle. First of all we want to get rid of the ship; second we want pearls, not for personal adornment so to speak but for profit; third, I believe the chap's yarn, and fourth I vote we close on his offer. What you say?"

"I'm with you on the pearls," said Harman, "and I'm ready to close on two conditions, and the first is that the beds haven't been stripped."

"We'll easily prove that," said Davis. "I've done pearling and I know the business."

"Second is," continued Harman, "that havin' hived the stuff we'll be able to get away with it."

"Maybe what more you'll be wanting is a mail boat to Frisco and a brass band to play us off. Isn't luck good enough to trust in? And look at the luck that's brought us here. What you want flying in the face of it for?"

"Well, maybe you're right," said the other. "The luck's all right if it holds. Question is, will it? I don't like that petticoat flyin' up in our face—it's part of the deal, seems to me, since he's droppin' this place mainly to get to her, and I've never seen a deal yet that wasn't crabbed if a woman put as much as the tip of her nose into it. I ain't superstitious, I'm only sayin' what I know, and all I'm saying is that it's ominous, him talking of——"

"Oh, shut up," said the other. "You're

worse than my old woman. I'm into this business whether or no and you can stay out if you want. How's it to be?"

Harman raised his head and sniffed the air tainted with the oysters rotting on the coral. Then he turned to the cabin hatch. "Come on," said he, and they went below to close the bargain.

IV.

Clayton's house was grass thatched like the others and situated close to the groves to the right of the village. It had three rooms and a veranda, and mats and native-made chairs constituted the chief furniture. Beyond the house was the shed where a few trade goods, mostly boxes of tobacco and rolls of print were stored.

"That's all there's left of the stuff I brought with me," said Clayton. "It'll carry you on and I make you a present of it. The Kanakas aren't used to high wages. A chap will dive all day for the fun of it and half a stick of tobacco, but you can do most of the diving yourselves and save on the business. There are the diving suits—two of them. Good as when I got them and the pump's in the boat there in that canoe house—it's a Clarkson, in good order. Say, boys, you've no reason to sneeze over this deal; here's an island, a living larder, pigs and fowl and yams and fish and fruit for nix, a pearl lagoon not half worked, diving suits and pump and a bit of trade and all for that frousty old brown boat of yours. Was you ever on your feet before?"

"Well, maybe," said Davis, "we've no call to complain if the beds are all right. Let's put out and look at them."

They took the *Douro's* boat and rowed out, Clayton steering and piloting them.

The beds ran north, acres of them and one of the Kanakas Clayton had taken with them dived now and then and brought up a pair of shells as a sample.

Big molluscs they were, weighing maybe eight hundred to the ton, of the white shell like the Tahiti oysters.

Davis, who knew something of the business, reckoned that the shell alone was worth five hundred dollars a ton, but he said nothing as the boat, impelled by the sculls, passed through the crystal water that was nowhere deeper than ten fathoms in the region of the beds.

Every lagoon would be a pearl lagoon but for the fact that the oyster of all sea creatures is the most difficult to suit with a breeding ground. The tides must not be too swift, the floor must be exactly right.

Javal lagoon was ideal, a bar of reef delaying the floor current and the coral showing the long coach-whip fucus loved by the pearl seeker. Davis declared himself satisfied and they rowed back to inspect the mounds of shell and oysters rotting on the beach which were to be thrown in as part of the good will of the business.

That night after supper Clayton showed his pearls. A few of them. He had four tin cash boxes and he opened one and disclosed his treasures lying between layers of cotton wool. You have seen chocolate creams in boxes—that was the sight that greeted the eyes of Harman and Davis, only the chocolate creams were pearls. Some were the size of marrowfat peas and some were the size of butter beans, very large, but not of very good shape; some were pure white, some gold and some rose.

"Don't show us no more or I guess we'll be robbin' you," said Harman.

V.

Next morning the pearl man began his preparations for departure. The water casks of the *Douro* were filled, chickens caught and cooped, a five pig embarked and the groves raided for nuts, bananas and bread fruit.

"It's well he's leavin' us the trees," said Harman.

The diving suits were got out and Clayton showed them how they were used, also the trick of filling the net bag with oysters in the swiftest way and without tangling the air tube. The beds were shallow enough to be worked without diving gear, but a man in a diving dress will raise five times as many pairs of shells as a man without in a given time. Clayton explained this. He left nothing wanting in the way of explanations and advice and next morning, having filled up with provisions and water, he put out, taking the ebb, the *Douro* heeling to a five-knot breeze and followed past the break by a clanging escort of gulls.

Then Harman and Davis found themselves alone, all alone, masters of a treasure that would have turned the head of Tiffany, and of a hundred and fifty Kanakas, men, women and children; a tribe captained and led by one Holka, a frizzy-headed buck whose only dress and adornment was a gee

string and the handle of a china utensil slung round his neck as a pendant.

The rotted oysters on the coral were useless. They had been worked over by Clayton. That was the first surprise. The next was the price of labor. Two sticks of tobacco a day was the price of native labor, not half a stick as reported by Clayton.

Trade tobacco just then worked out at two cents a stick, so the pay was not exorbitant. It was the smallness of the stock in hand that bothered our syndicate. But Holka was adamant. He did not know ten words of English but he knew enough to enforce his claims and the syndicate had to give in.

"I knew there'd be flies in the 'intment, somewhere," said Harman, "but this is a blue bottle. We haven't tobacco enough to work this lagoon a month, and what's to happen then?"

"No use bothering a month ahead," replied Davis. "If worst comes to the worst we'll just have to do the diving ourselves. Get into your harness and down with you, to see how it works."

Harman did, and an appalling rush of bubbles followed his descent. The suit was faulty. Tropical weather does not improve diving suits and Harman was got up just in time.

"Never again," said he when the window was unscrewed and he had done cursing Clayton, Clayton's belongings, his family, his relatives and his ancestors.

"Stick her on the beach. Damn divin' suits. Let's take to the water natural."

They did, following the practice of the Kanakas and at the end of the week when the shells were rotted out, six days' takings showed three large pearls perfect in every point and worth maybe fifteen hundred dollars, five small pearls varying in value from ten to forty dollars according to Davis' calculations, several baroques of small and uncertain value and a spoonful of seeds.

"Call it two thousand dollars," said Davis when they had put the takings away in some cotton wool left by Clayton and a small soap box. "Call it two thousand, and we've had twenty Kanakas diving for a week at two sticks a day; that makes two hundred and forty sticks at two cents a stick."

"Four dollars eighty," said Harman. "Wonder what the unions would say to us and them chaps that's always spoutin' on the sand lot about the wages of the workin' classes—not that I'm against fair wages. I reckon if that guy Clayton had left us enough tobacco I wouldn't mind raisin' the wage bill to eight dollars a week, but we haven't got it—haven't enough to last a month as it's runnin' now."

He spoke the truth. Less than a month left them cleared out and the Kanakas struck to a man and ceased to dive, spending their time fishing, lazing in the sun and smoking—but their chief amusement was watching the white men at work.

There is no penitentiary equal to a pearl lagoon, once it seizes you, and no galley slaves under the whip ever worked harder than Harman and Bud Davis, stripped to the skin, brown as cob nuts with sun and water, long-haired, disheveled, diving like otters and bringing up not more than a hundred pairs of shells a day.

The boat had to be anchored over a certain spot and as the work went on the anchorage had to be shifted. At the end of the day the oysters had to be brought ashore and laid out on the coral to rot. Then, too tired, almost, to smoke, the pearl syndicate would stretch itself under the stars to dream of fortune and the various ways of spending money.

The ingenuous Harman had quite definite views on that business; diamonds and dollar Henry Clays, champagne and palatial bars, standing drinks to all and sundry and a high time generally—that was his idea. Davis, darker and more secretive, had higher ambitions roughly formulated in the words "More money." Dollars breed dollars and great wealth was enough for him; he would spend his money on making more, sure in his mind that if he once got his foot again in Frisco with a pocketful of money he would find his way out through the big end of the horn.

And so they went on till at the end of four months they took stock of their possessions and found themselves forty thousand dollars up, to use Davis' words.

Taken by the hands of the Kanakas in the first month and by their own hands in the three succeeding months they had safely hived forty-seven white and perfect pearls, two golden pearls, one defective, some red pearls not worth more than a shilling a grain, and, king of the collection, a great black pearl, pear-shaped and perfect and equal to any Mexican in luster and value. There were also some baroques of

extraordinary shapes and a quantity of seeds.

Of the forty-seven white pearls, four were of very large size. Davis had no scales but he reckoned that these four and the black were worth all the rest put together.

The general stock taking brought an end to their luck and for weeks after the take was a joke, to use Davis' expression. It is always so in pearling; a man may make a small fortune out of a fishery in a few months, but the take is never consistent and if he strikes it rich at first it is ten to one he will have to pay for his luck.

One morning, just as the sun was freeing himself from the reef and the last of the gulls departing for their deep-sea fishing grounds, Harman, who had been to draw water from the well, suddenly dropped the bucket he was carrying, shaded his eyes and gave a shout that brought Davis from the house.

Davis looked to where the other was pointing and there far off to the north and lit by the newly risen sun stood a sail.

They had been praying for a ship for the last fortnight, speculating on the chances of anything picking them up before they died of hope deferred and loneliness and a diet of fish and vegetable truck. Yet now, before that sail hard on the blue and evidently making toward them, they scarcely felt surprised, and were too troubled to be filled with joy; for it suddenly occurred to them that pearls were pearls—that is to say, wealth in its most liftable form.

"Say, Bud," cried Harman, "we've got to hide 'them divin' dresses. If these chaps ain't on the straight and they sniff pearls we'll be robbed sure and shoved in the lagoon. I never thought of that before. We're sure marks for every tough till we've cashed in and banked the money."

"You aren't far wrong," replied Davis, still contemplating the sail. "Yes, she's making for here and she's all a hundred and fifty tons. Inside two hours she'll be off the reef and we've no time to waste."

Most of the island Kanakas had gone fishing the night before to the other side of the atoll, so there were only a few old women and children about to mark the actions of the pearl syndicate.

First they dealt with the boat that held the pump, sinking it by the inner beach in four-fathom water at a point where the trees came down right across the sands. Then they dumped the diving suits in a fish pool of the outer beach. Having done this they divided the pearls, making two parcels of them, and surprisingly small parcels they were, considering their value.

"Now," said Harman when all was done, "we're shipwrecked chaps, blown ashore. We don't know nothing about pearls and we reckon the house and godown were built by some trader the Kanakas has murdered. How's that for a yarn to sling them?—but what's the name of our ship?"

"The *Mary Ann Smithers,*" replied Davis promptly, "from Tampico to Frisco, cargo of hides and wool, badly battered off the Horn, old man's name Sellers, and driven out of our course by the big gale a month ago. There wasn't any gale a month ago, but it's a million to one they were a thousand miles off then, so how are they to know?"

"You was second officer," said Harman.

"No, I was bos'n. Second officers are supposed to be in the know of the navigation and all such. I was just bos'n, plain Jim Davis."

"Well, they won't dispute you're plain enough," said Harman. "But you ain't the cut of a bos'n, not to my mind. Cable's length nearer you are to the look of a preacher or a card sharp. No need to get riled—be a bos'n and be damned, be anythin' you like. I'm an A. B. hop sacker, British born and—here they are."

The fore canvas of the schooner was just showing at the break.

## VI.

She came in laying the water behind her as though she had a hundred square miles of harbor to maneuver in. Then the wind shivered out of her canvas and almost on the splash of the anchor a boat was dropped.

Harman and Davis watched it as it came ashore, noted the stroke of the broad-backed Kanaka rowers and the sun helmet of the white man in the stern and his face under the helmet as he stepped clear of the water on to the beach.

Mandelbaum was the name of the newcomer; a dark, small man with a face expressionless as a wedge of ice. He wore glasses.

As he stepped onto the sand he looked about him in seeming astonishment, first at Harman, then at Davis, then at the house, then at the beach.

"Who the devil are you?" asked he.

"Same to yourself," replied Harman. "We're derelicks. Hooker bust herself on the reef in a big blow more'n a month ago. Who are you?"

"My name is Mandelbaum," replied the other.

"Well, come up on the verandy and have a drink," said the hospitable Harman, "and we can have a clack before goin' aboard. You the captain of that hooker?"

"I am," said Mandelbaum.

"Then I reckon you won't mind givin' us a lift. We're not above workin' for our grub. Set down till I get some drinkin' nuts."

There was a long seat under the veranda. The house door was at the westward end of the house and the seat ran from the door to the eastern end. It was long enough for maybe ten people to sit on comfortably and when the three sat down on the seat, Harman having fetched the nuts, Mandelbaum, throwing his right leg over his left knee and turning comfortably and in a lazy manner toward the others, said:

"Where's Clayton?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Harman.

Davis said nothing. His mouth fell open and before he could shut it, Mandelbaum got in again.

"Don't go to the trouble of trying any monkey tricks. There's half a dozen fellows with Winchesters on that schooner. Your bluff is called. Where's Clayton, my partner? He and a year's taking of pearls ought to be here. I bring the schooner back with more trade goods and he's gone, and I find you two scow barkers in his house and serving strangers with your drinking nuts." A venomous tang was coming into the steady voice and a long, slick navy revolver came out of his left-hand coat pocket into his right hand with the muzzle resting on his right knee.

"Where's Clayton? Dead—but where? Where have you planted him, and where have you cached the pearls?"

"Cached the pearls!" suddenly cried Harman, finding his voice and taking in the whole situation. Then he began to laugh. He laughed as though he were watching Charlie Chaplin or something equally funny. He was. The picture of Clayton stood before him; Clayton making off with his partner's share of the pearls and handing the island and the fishing rights to him and Davis in return for the ketch; the picture of Davis and himself working like galley slaves, doing four months' hard labor for the sake of Mandelbaum—for well he knew Mandelbaum would make them stump up to the last baroque.

Then he sat with his chin on his fists spitting on the ground while Davis explained. And Harman soliloquized, sometimes quite out aloud: "No, it ain't no use—straight's the only word in the dictionary. No damn use at all, ain't enough mugs—and a petticoat on top of all——"

"Well, what's the 'ultermatum?'" asked Harman, a day later, as he stood by a native canoe on the beach.

"It's either stick here and work for two dollars a day or get out for the Paumotus," replied Davis, coming up from a last interview with Mandelbaum. "Which'll we do—stick here and work for Mandelbaum for two dollars a day sure money, house, grub and everything found, or put for the Paumotus in this blessed canoe which his royal highness says we can have in exchange for the ship's money he's robbed us of? Which is it to be, the society of Mandelbaum or the Paumotus—which is hell, sharks, tide races, contr'y winds and starvation, maybe."

"The Paumotus," said Harman without a moment's hesitation.

*Another story of this series in the next issue.*

## A MOOT QUESTION

HALF a dozen congressmen were lounging in the Democratic cloakroom of the House when the talk turned to Yap. Surmise busied itself with what Secretary of State Hughes would do, following Japan's refusal to discuss the little island's status at Mr. Harding's Washington conference.

"As far as I can make out," said Hal Flood, ranking Democrat on the committee on foreign affairs, "nobody knows whether we're to have Yap as a cable station or a stable altercation."

# The Merry Wife of Windsor

By C. S. Montanye

*Author of "Oliver's Twist," "The School for Scandrel," Etc.*

**Mr. Ottie Scandrel, ex-pugilist, ex-screen star, adds another ex to the collection.**

ACCORDING to a treatise I read the other night, written by one Mr. Shakespeare of Avon a few fiscal years ago, life was rather disturbing on the other side of the well-known Atlantic. If we're to take this word tinker's say-so, a little thing like a public murder was less than half of nothing. In those days swords were as common as safety razors, and the boys who didn't draw them were merely members of the nobility who paid the roughnecks to go out and do it for them, while robbery, arson and a few other outdoor amusements frowned on by the law now, took the place of three-a-day vodevil. If you can believe the above-mentioned book, *nobody* was safe any time unless they'd been measured up for a pair of steel corsets and a helmet and then the chances were they'd get knocked anyway!

Oh, them were the happy days for a fact!

But coming right down to it what man, woman or child has enough courage to arise and admit that anything happening *then* can't be tied *now?* It's true our voters don't breeze around using a pikestaff for a walking stick but the present-day excitement measures up pretty sweet on its own behalf. What more pulse-quickening than our own crime waves, "Babe" Ruth, auto fatalities, graft investigations, traffic problems, the Follies, and some of these truck-driver heavyweights who are going to startle the universe by knocking Monsieur Dempsey as stiff as a quart of starch? And in this same connection what had the days of the merry greenwood to compare with the dancing-marathon craze that recently went through the country like a bullet through a paper bag?

No fooling, what had Francis Bacon and the rest of them on their lists to outexcite that one?

The dancing-marathon craze overtook the big city like a motor-cycle cop picking up a fliv for speeding. One night about eleven bells you went to bed in total ignorance of this fox-trot epidemic and the next morning when you beat the milkman to it and pounced upon your favorite newspaper—if the hall boy hadn't beat you to that—you got an eyeful of the stirring story of how some sweet young thing had pulled a dizzy dance marathon and gone fifty-some hours at the small cost of four pair of dogs and ten pounds in weight. If you could control your merriment and read on, you understood what a bone some one pulled when they called the gals the weaker sex.

On the level, these feminine marathon hounds not only danced the boys silly but actually reduced a quantity to the highest degree of near imbecility. It's on the records where one of these masculine heel shakers down in Georgia climbed up on the rafters after forty-two hours of "on with the dance" and wouldn't come down, no matter how many sticks they poked at him.

Yes, waltzing away the hours surely had the darbs moving around in circles!

This dance craze had a lot to do with a certain party known to the country at large as Mr. Ottie Scandrel. If it hadn't been for the record-breaking, continual ballroom performance, it's fairly safe to say that Scandrel would have taken a lot of money out of Broadway and the public pavilion where the clowns flocked to drag the socks. Why Scandrel didn't clean up can be laid at the door of a little eye opener who answered to the name of Yvonne Windsor and to a lot of other things which make this narrative not another story but the one you're being tightened up for.

Let 'em ride!

It was just after some Cleveland broad up and gave New York a laugh by breaking the dance-marathon record by nine hours that Scandrel in pictures on the coast pulled a faux pas in Hollywood where he was earning his bread and tea. It seemed that Scandrel's ideas and the scenario of his pictures didn't agree. He might have gotten away with it at that if his releases had set the country on fire. The truth was Scandrel, a former welterweight box fighter, as a comedy clown didn't get his stuff over and the directors of the Classic Film Features, the firm that paid him a thousand berries a week cold, were more than glad of an excuse to tear up his contract. After Mr. Scandrel gave them his opinion of the works and cuffed a few of his late enemies for luck he turned his back on the coast, snapped his fingers and listened to some brakeman holler: "Times Square next stop!"

All this happened around the same minute that Looie Pitz, the well-known fight manager, had "Left Hook Chick" Windsor training up at my Bronx gym for a scuffle with one of the better-grade lightweights who were causing Gotham gossip. Windsor, formerly a soft-shoe hoofer, who had been lighting up small-time vodevil in company with his wife, had allowed Pitz to discover him and lead him out from the foot and into the arc lights.

That Left Hook Windsor was clever is the same as saying Paul Jones had a head on his shoulders. It took less than a trio of battles for Windsor to convince the skeptics that he was there thirty ways. He was so fast with his hands that he made a card-trick shark look like winter molasses and he knocked harder than any wife when talking her husband over with the neighbors. Not only that but Windsor was as cool as a nut sundae and as scientific as a surgeon.

Really, the instant Looie Pitz got wise to Windsor's quality that baby began to think in dollars where he had formerly thought in dimes! All Looie could see was a big crash with the champ and old age spent in the back seat of a big sixteen-cylinder limousine where he could lounge back and nonchalantly say: "The Ritz, James, and step on her a trifle!"

One hour and eight minutes after Scandrel hit the Big Town he had busted a way into the gym where Left Hook Windsor was doing his stuff for the gentlemen of the press and a few paid admissions who were gazing witlessly at the clever manner in which he was mistreating his sparring partners. I got a peek at Scandrel as he came in through the front door. The next second he was beating me about the shoulder blades.

"I'm back home again, O'Grady!" Scandrel yelped. "Take it from me there's only one thing worse than California and that's the movies they make out there! Fond mamma! What a terrible error that place is to be sure! How's every one?"

"Lay off that racket," Looie Pitz put in, "or that's what visitors will be asking when they get up to and draw near your bedside. Who give you a license to tear in here and create a disturbance, no matter where you come from?"

"Get calm!" Scandrel hissed, dropping my hand and picking up Looie's. "What's a little thing like a box fighter showing off for the newspaper boys when *I* just got home?"

"As nonsensical as ever, I see," Pitz sighed. "Won't you never catch yourself some sense? This here young man doesn't have to show off for anybody. He happens to be Left Hook Windsor—that's all!"

"Are you kidding me?" Scandrel grinned. "Who may Left Hook Windsor be? I don't remember having heard them tell of that party during the course of my travels."

"It's easy to see you've been somewhere," the manager snapped. "Windsor's the next crown wearer or I can't distinguish my foot from my wrist! Now control yourself and keep quiet. If you've got to talk your travels over to some one give Burton Holmes a bell."

With that the manager sighted an incoming sport writer and departed with alacrity.

Just as he left Windsor pushed his left across to the button and sent his sparring partner for a dive to the canvas.

"Rotton, what?" I said to Scandrel.

He ceased fingering the four-carat diamond stick pin in his cravat and smirked.

"So you say! It's dollars to crullers that I could handle three jockos like him and tuck them all in without putting a wrinkle in the nine-dollar silk shirt I'm wearing. So this is what the profession has come to since I've been away in the pictures. Pitiful is the word for it!"

"Are you going back in the ring?" I queried with some curiosity.

"Get off!" Scandrel sneered. "Me mingle with them pug uglies again? I'm laughing! I'm not 'Battling' Scandrel the cattle puncher no longer. I'm *Mister* Otto Scandrel, the ex-screen favorite. Listen, Joe. I've got a wad of currency in the kick a Russian wolfhound would think twice about before trying to leap over it. That's really what brung me up here to-day. Later on I got to rush downtown on a little business matter. And that reminds me. I know something that you don't."

"What's that?" I answered.

"You're going downtown with me," Scandrel replied, grinning like a seal. "I need a witness. You're him!"

Accordingly, after Ottie had been formally introduced to Left Hook Windsor and had murdered a couple of hours by giving the tale of his adventures to any one who cared to listen—and a lot who didn't—he looked me up and we went downstairs together. At the curb was the taxi that had brought Scandrel up and which he had forgotten about. He was in the act of arousing the chauffeur when a nifty little light-blue roadster shot around the corner and pulled in behind the cab. Out of it stepped Chick Windsor's wife, the enticing Yvonne.

The promising lightweight's better half was twice as beautiful as any hoppy's dream. She had one of these schoolgirl complexions you see on fences and faces, eyes that were deeper than blue and a smile that would have made any one wealthy if they could put it up in bottles. She was turned out in clinging silk and was no more interesting to look at than a gang of kids around a hurdy-gurdy.

Still working in vodevil where she had been doing a single since her husband had first started to earn a living with his hands instead of his feet, all the boys and girls along Smile Boulevard knew Yvonne Windsor for a good pal and a regular. The popular consensus of opinion was that in spite of success she was neither upstage or at all Plaza.

Yvonne made the pavement as Ottie Scandrel gave me a nudge.

"Who says I was out of my mind when I told the movies where I got off at!" he said hoarsely. "I seen them swell-looking babies that do their tricks for the camera but outside of one of them I never seen the equal of this jane yet. Pardon me while I learn her phone number!"

He would have made an immediate break for Yvonne if I hadn't caught his arm.

"What are you trying to do—win yourself a stretch for disorderly conduct?" I said. "That little gal is Mrs. Windsor—she's married!"

Scandrel turned with a sneer.

"Well, what's that got to do with it—have they cut out giving divorce decrees since I've been away? Left Hook Windsor's *frau,* hey? That makes it easy. I could stiffen that lad if I was down on my back with typhoid! So you know her, Joe? Give me an introduction immediately or I'll turn your head so far around that when you're walking backward you'll be going forward!"

Yvonne finished looking at the ignition of the classy roadster, saw us and greeted me with a smile.

"Isn't this perfect weather, Mr. O'Grady?" she said.

"The best of its brand!" Scandrel butted in cheerfully. "And don't let no one tell you that it can be beat anywhere! I just come in from the coast. If you've got a minute or two to spare I'd like to tell you about the weather they blow about around Hollywood."

"Mrs. Windsor," I interrupted, "let me introduce you to Mr. Scandrel."

Yvonne looked at Ottie with a smile.

"Surely not Ottie Scandrel, the comedian of the Classic Features?" she cooed.

The big buffoon beside me almost leaped out of his shoes.

"That's me, cutey! But don't be looking no more for me on the screen. I'm off that stuff for life! A guy's a sucker to waste his best years taking orders through a megaphone and reading them idiotic mush notes simple wimmen are continually annoying him with!"

He went on dishing out the gravy until Yvonne looked at her wrist watch.

"I promised my hubby I'd call for him in the car," she stated finally. "I haven't any vaudeville bookings until I break in a new act in Chicago next month. So I'm cooking Chick a real home dinner to-night. You'll excuse me, I know."

"If you insist!" Scandrel said with one of his best smirks. "A real home dinner? That sounds like music to me. Invite me and Joe up some night and I'll show you what I think of home cookery." He took off his hat three times when Yvonne left us to enter the gym and then looked at me and shook his head. "Is there anything the matter with that little woman, Joe?"

"In what way?"

"Is she correct mentally?" he inquired. "How could a world beater like her ever give the altar a play with a bolognie snatcher like Left Hook Windsor? Honest, there was only one that could ever come a mile near her. That skirt answered to the name of Priscilla Joy. She was a maid in one of my first fillums and the two of us might have been one now if some fathead director hadn't gated her on account of the way she carried a tray!"

We entered the taxi, Scandrel giving the chauffeur a hint of where we wanted to go.

"You're taking me—where?" I asked.

Scandrel leaned back against the seat, put his brogans up on the window ledge to give his ankles an airing and borrowed a cigarette.

"It's this way," he began. "For the last two months I've been in communication with a party whose name is Sigmund Flannagan. This Flannagan owns the Broadway Flower Gardens and he's trying to sell out so he can go back to dear old Budapest and look up his relatives. I heard about him wanting to close out and dropped him a note asking his lowest figure on the property. Back come an answer saying thirty thousand cash and not a nickel less. This is good for a snicker. I offered him twenty grand merely to kid him along and he shoots me a wire collect saying that for twenty-five thousand the place is mine. By this time I'm laughing and so I make him a tender of fifteen thousand even just to see what he would do. Well, Flannagan waits two weeks before writing and saying that he'll close out the works for twenty thousand which is positively his lowest price. Immediately I offer him ten thousand and he answers that as a special favor to me he'll sell the dive if I send him a certificate check for fifteen thousand bucks plus eighty-five cents—the pence being to pay him back for the ink, paper and postage stamps he used. We're slipping down to the Broadway Gardens now. If they attract me I'll dicker with Flannagan until I get the layout at my own figure. I'm from Waltham—watch me!"

The resort was located on the main stem between Times Square and Columbus Circle. Our taxi drew up to the front door with a flourish and Scandrel alighted.

"One minute, pal," the chauffeur broke in. "You owe me thirteen-sixty."

*"Whom?"* Scandrel demanded, turning.

"That's what's on the clock," the driver insisted. "Don't take my word for it—use your eyes!"

"Are you trying to tell me the cab fare up to the Bronx and back is that much?" Scandrel bawled. "You poor half-wit, you ought to see by looking at me that I ain't no come-in for a James Jesse like you. Here's two bucks. Hand me an argument and you'll spend the rest of your life working to pay your doctor's bill!"

Flinging the chauffeur a pair of emerald sailors and not waiting to find out whether or not they were picked up, Scandrel grabbed my arm and led the way into the Broadway Flower Gardens. This ambush turned out to be a glorified dance hall that was like a dozen others of its kind. There were tables on all four sides for the Orange Pekoe crowd, a dance floor and dance orchestra of eleven pieces if you counted the drummer twice. About two dozen of the brew fanatics of both sexes were scattered about, resting in between spasms of hoofing, and a few waiters looked on languidly. My boy friend rolled an eye at his surroundings with no more interest than a tourist entering Paris for the first time.

"How's business?" Scandrel asked the nearest servitor.

"What business is that of yours?" the waiter demanded. "We're not selling no hooch—if that's what you're looking for. There ain't a drop of whisky in the house!"

"I'll make you a present of a little punch!" Scandrel growled. "Be yourself! When I ask a question I get an answer. How's business?"

The waiter looked him over.

"Not very good, sir," he replied with the utmost civility.

"How so?" Scandrel insisted. "Don't be making no secrets out of it. Your future health depends on the way you loosen up."

"It's this way," the man made haste to explain. "The prices are all wrong here. I don't want to be biting the hand that feeds me but Mr. Flannagan is cutting off his nose despite his face. He's so tight that Shylock and them European misers look like spendthrifts beside him. The boss calls sasparilla sawsparilla and charges fifty cents a bottle for it under that title. Ice cream is eighty cents a plate and club sandwiches are a case note a throw. You can step across the street and eat your head off for thirty-five yen but here they try to get away with it under the excuse of dancing and consequently the joint has been losing money constantly and consistently. Listen, friend, you ain't gonna tell the boss I was giving away the cause of what's leading him to the verge of bankruptcy?"

"Get calm!" Scandrel said pleasantly. "I'm thinking of buying this infirmary as it stands. Tell Flannagan I'm here. The name is Scandrel."

"Not 'Battling' Scandrel?"

"The same. Now be on your way before I prove it!" Ottie snapped.

In not more than ten minutes back came the waiter with the boss in tow. Sigmund Flannagan was one of these half portions with crafty eyes and a perpetual grin that meant nothing at all. If anything he was younger than Ottie and in spite of bad business was dressed like a leading man from his cloth-topped shoes to the stud on his five-inch collar.

"Er—now—Mr. Scandrel?" he began, shaking hands with me.

"Over here!" Ottie barked. "Don't be getting so familiar with my friends when you don't know them. I just now come in from the coast. If this emporium is still for sale I'll make you a price on it but don't give me no sob stuff about no sick wife."

"How can I—I ain't even married!" Sigmund Flannagan whined, rubbing his hands. "So you're still interested in buying? Since you wrote me last I'm not so anxious to sell but of course business is business. For twenty thousand dollars you can have the Gardens as they stand."

Scandrel laughed coldly.

"Ain't that comical? Your price has gone up again while mine has gone down. I'm offering you five thousand berries. Take it or leave it, only be quick. I'm a busy man."

"Five thousand dollars!" Flannagan wailed. "Make it ten—for a nickel less I wouldn't sell to my own brother!"

"Nor to me neither!" Scandrel answered, giving me a look. "Come on, Joe. Let's step out and look at some of the other dance factories they're almost giving away!"

Sigmund Flannagan caught Ottie's arm.

"One minute! Maybe I am a little high. I'll knock off a dollar or two for cash! Come to my private office and let's talk it over!"

After that it was a question merely of the one winning who had the best staying powers. An hour and a half later Ottie closed the deal for five thousand, five hundred cash and we staggered out for air. The instant we hit the pavement the taxi chauffeur who had brought us down from the Bronx sprang out from the doorway, waving a police whistle.

"Hey, guys!" he bawled. "I want to knock off for supper now so let's settle up. Gimme the nineteen dollars or I'll blow for a bull!"

"Nineteen dollars?" Scandrel hollered. "A while ago it was only thirteen-sixty!"

"That was a while ago!" the tin-can pirate retorted. "The boiler's been standing with the engine running ever since the two of you went inside here. You didn't tell me nothing about not waiting. C'mon. I'll whistle for a cop if you don't come across. There's one opposite now!"

Ottie looked at me and we both looked at the patrolman who was toying with the traffic.

"You'd better dig for the poke!" I advised.

Scandrel fished out his leather and pulled off a twenty.

"Listen," he said to the chauffeur. "Out in Hollywood one of them big-flicker concerns are putting on a drama entitled 'The Life of Captain Kidd.' They're paying anybody twenty bucks a day if they know anything about piracy. You'd better snap out and tap the director on the shoulder. Here, I forgot to give you the interest on the nineteen fish!"

The door of the taxi was open. Scandrel stepped back like a flash of lightning and shot over a wicked right hook. It flung the chauffeur through the door and into the seat where he crumpled up.

"Let's find out where the subway's hidden, O'Grady," Ottie said with a grin before he shut the door of the cab and nonchalantly turned away.

A week after that and the Broadway Flower Gardens, slightly redecorated and with all prices reduced was doing more business in one night than Sigmund Flannagan accomplished in two weeks straight. Scandrel must have listened to the knowing waiter who tipped him the first day because he not only advertised extensively but featured dance instructors and a team of ballroom hoofers known to the trade as Monsieur la Tour and Mademoiselle Fifi. All this combined brought in the shillings and began to get the resort talked about among the dance mad who rushed up and down the main pipe line every night in search of exercise.

I got into the place one night about eleven-thirty and found Ottie lounging near the orchestra, as pleased with his surroundings as a Pekingese with a bonbon. From the crowd on the floor and the mob at the tables it was easy to see he was taking in the nickels twice as fast as a conductor.

"Make out I was a dumb Greek buying this lair," he chuckled when I joined him. "Honest, it was a gift! Say, you're just in time to see me tread the light fanatic. Has anybody told you that I'm the Monsieur la Tour who tours from one end of the room to the other? That's me, a regular dawncer and everything!"

"You're kidding!" I said.

Scandrel grinned like a seal that had just been handed a frozen fish.

"Am I? String with me and I'll introduce you to the Mademoiselle Fifi I step with. All I'm paying her is a century and a quarter a week. But she's worth it six times over, no fooling!"

He led me across the room to the side lines and up to a table where a blonde in a black-lace evening gown sat. Her beauty began where Cleopatra's left off. The profile she had turned to me was slightly familiar but I didn't learn her identity until Scandrel gave her a word and she looked up. Then I found myself gazing into the sea-blue eyes of Yvonne Windsor!

"I believe you two know each other," Scandrel grinned. "Sit down and take a load off your ankles, O'Grady. Do me a favor and amuse Yvonne while I tell the orchestra leader about how I want our tango music played. For a fact, he gets the time of it off his watch!"

Scandrel blew and I considered Left Hook Windsor's wife sadly.

"You needn't look at me like that," Yvonne said petulantly. "I'm here with Chick's full permission—I should say his knowledge. Why shouldn't I accept a position at one hundred and twenty-five dollars a week when conditions in vaudeville are terrible just at present."

"What do you think of Scandrel?" I queried.

Yvonne pursed her lips.

"I think he's delicious. Even his worst enemy can't say he hasn't confidence in himself. Why, that was half the battle won when I first began to teach him how to do the tango. Of course he's a terrible dancer and all that but he's so confident of himself that he's really memorized all the steps and can go through them with hardly any mistakes. It's remarkable!"

She was still telling me about the number when Scandrel came back, pulling down his cuffs.

"All set, Yvonne? I told that orchestra leader if he doubled up on us I'd smack him plenty. String along—we'll get a chord in a minute!"

Yvonne stood and a minute later the musicians broke out in a rash of South American foot music. With his silly pan lighted up by an idiotic smile, Ottie Scandrel got a throat hold on the wife of Left Hook Windsor and rolled out on the floor, which had been conveniently cleared. One look was enough to tell any one that Ottie was the cat's fallen arches. Five minutes of dipping, bending and swaying and the big clown had Valentino's famous movie tango reduced to a number from a burlesque olio. For a fact, it was a scream! He had more steps than a front porch and the only reason he didn't pull a bone was because Yvonne steered him through the difficult spots like a pilot on a Mississippi side-wheeler. With any one but Ottie doing the tango the dance would have been immense. As it was the fascinating Yvonne's grace, face and smile made the crowd forget Scandrel and come through heavy with the applause thing when it ended at last.

Ottie immediately stepped forward and took all the bows!

Settling back in my chair I noticed a new pair of clients had entered and were

seated at the next table. One was a brunet girl who was just as good looking in a dark way as Madam Windsor was in a light. She was all in thrilling black and wore a string of pearls that dangled from a neck that might have been made out of pink marble. Her eyes were the kind that drove men to the river and she had a foot you could put in your vest pocket. What was astonishing was the fact this eye-widener was escorted and chaperoned by no one else except the ex-owner of the Broadway Flower Gardens—Sigmund Flannagan, the baby who wouldn't pay a nickel to see Nero play the cello while Rome burned up—or down!

I was still staring at the chicken when Scandrel and Yvonne came back. Ottie slightly out of breath but no more pleased with himself than a jockey who had kicked six winners home at interesting odds.

"Maybe I don't know how to tango a bit, Joe!" he chuckled, falling into a chair before Yvonne was seated. "Of course, I ain't no champeen yet but gimme a chance—I'm new at the game. You did very well," he said to Mrs. Windsor. "If you keep it up I wouldn't be surprised if you turned out to be famous. Hey, waiter! Three Garden Specials and make it hasty." He gave me a wink. "That's the most expensive drink in the house, O'Grady. It's got everything in it except the nickel polish we use out on the fountain."

As the waiter sped away I happened to turn and discovered the knock-out brunette at the next table staring at us as if she had studied hypnotism. Flannagan was up to his ears in a club sandwich and taking absolutely no notice of anything.

"Is that a friend of yours at the next table?" I asked Yvonne.

"No, I never saw her before," she said.

Scandrel turned nonchalantly. The next minute he leaped out of his chair and shot across the aisle as if chased by a bullet.

"Priscilla!" he bellowed. "Well, well, well! If this ain't an astounding surprise then Washington never even seen the Delaware! What are you doing here, when did you dock, are you still in the pictures, did you know I own this jump off, what do you think of me as a dancer, how long are you staying in town, where are you stopping at?"

He was still asking similar questions when Sigmund Flannagan untangled himself from his sandwich.

"Hey, wait a minute!" he yelped. "Whom do you think Miss Joy is—Information? She's with——"

With hardly a glance at him Ottie introduced Miss Joy to Yvonne and myself. It seemed the little brunette looker was the same party who had been in a picture with him out on the coast and that she had come East the week before to try her luck in the theatrical game of the big city.

While all the explanation was going on Sigmund Flannagan sat gnashing his teeth. If looks had been poison the former owner of the Gardens could have opened a drug store on the spot. He didn't say anything until Scandrel insisted Miss Joy come over and park at our table. Then he got up with a deepening frown and tapped Scandrel on the shoulder.

"Didn't you hear me tell you before that Miss Joy is with me?" he whined. "Ain't you got no manners butting in on us? Suppose you did know her last month. What's that got to do with to-night?"

Ottie brushed his remarks aside as if they were paralyzed flies.

"Don't be arguing with me or cracking jokes! This here table only seats four and if four's company—five's a fight! You used to own this slab so you know where you've got your lid checked. Collect it and air out! Absence makes the heart grow fonder!"

Flannagan drew a deep breath. For a minute I had an idea he was going to slap Scandrel and run. Then discretion got the better part of valor and he shook his head and shrugged carelessly.

"You're a soft drink—that's the dirtiest name I can call you!" he mumbled before turning on his heel and disappearing.

"You shouldn't have been so severe, Ottie," Yvonne Windsor remarked. "That was positively rude."

"Stand back!" Scandrel chuckled. "That jocko wouldn't know etiquette if somebody mailed it to him in an envelope. He used to own this foundry. I guess he's as sore as a sprain because I had enough sense to buy him out and put it on a paying basis. Where did you know him from, Priscilla?"

Miss Joy showed us what lovely teeth she had.

"It was rather queer." she confessed in a voice that sounded like the interior of a bird store. "A number of years ago Sigmund used to be a small-time booking agent. He routed me when I was in a sister act and

he used to be real sweet on me—if I do say so myself. Almost the first person I met when I got in town again was him. He's a persevering little chap and really he's not so bad. And he tells me he expects to have a bank roll soon that will sink a submarine."

Scandrel looked at Yvonne and laughed coarsely.

"Indeed? Well, as Joe O'Grady knows, that little stiff ain't got brains enough to brush himself off if he fell in the mud. I took this kafe away from him at a ridiculous price and if that's a sample of his business ability it's a safe bet that he'll never have any of Morgan's associates worried. Here come the Specials. Let's all take a dive!"

The next day up in the gym, Left Hook Windsor while toying with his sparring partners, and playing a game of knock 'em down and pick 'em up, displayed the makings of a beautiful grouch. This same grouch was so marked that a few of the press boys who had wandered in to dip up a little news commented upon it openly.

"What's the matter with him?" I asked Looie Pitz after Windsor had torn savagely into his third and last victim.

Looie shook a gloomy head.

"These women!" he muttered. "Didn't you hear about it? Chick and Yvonne had fisticuffs of their own. It's a shame. It all begun about a steak she cooked the other night. It seems she left it get overdone and Chick bawled her out. She didn't say nothing then but when she come home the next night she broke the news about how she was working for one-twenty-five down at Scandrel's place. This put my lad on his ear and I guess they must have mixed it plenty because Yvonne packed her little grip and is now residing with some friends down on Fifty-second Street. Ain't matrimony grand?"

A couple of more visits to the Broadway Flower Gardens and from the line Scandrel passed out I conceived the idea he was giving the charming Yvonne and the enchanting Priscilla Joy an even break. He danced with Yvonne at night and clowned around with Priscilla in the afternoon. What hit him the hardest was the jack he was spending. In one week he moaned about spending seventeen dollars.

"But can you picture Solomon and them ither lady assassins?" Scandrel said. "I suppose I shouldn't kick. I went into this with my eyes open, anyway."

"But what do you expect to get out of it?" I queried.

"A wife—naturally!" he answered. "I might be thick but I'm not dumb! Just as a secret between the two of us I think that eventually I'll be taking a trip down to the altar with Yvonne—after she gets a divorce from that fathead box fighter she's hooked up with now. She's got about as much use for him as I have for a cold in the head. I ain't said a word but I've got eyes and I can see she's crazy mad about me. Well, such is life! The only thing that's going to make me feel tough is Priscilla. That little gal is as wild as Russia about me."

The next night Left Hook Windsor, with his handlers, manager and myself for company, ran over to the Three Star A. C., on the outskirts of Newark, to settle the scuffle arranged between himself and a former steam fitter who answered to the name of "Two Minute" Gallagher. This Gallagher was one of the noisiest of the lightweight division. To muffle him Looie Pitz had agreed to let his boy step a few frames with him. Going over Windsor didn't have very much to remark about but the minute the prelims were over and he was in the arena he began to say it with wallops.

As New Jersey barred a referee's decision, Windsor went after a clean knock-out. In the first round he held Gallagher at arm's length, boxing him and tearing him to ribbons. Twice he flattened the challenger and the last time he put him down the count clicked off was up to nine before the bell interfered with the pastime. In that round Windsor slapped him on every part of his anatomy except the ankle bones.

The second round began with the crowd roaring for the curtain punch. Two Minute Gallagher came out of his corner, still red from Windsor's body punches, but game and willing. He shot out and fell into a clinch. The referee tore them apart and Windsor dived for him. A straight left to the plexus brought Gallagher's guard down like a flag. As quick as lightning Windsor braced himself and uppercut with his right. The punch threw Gallagher back against the ropes. He caught at them, let go and sank down on the canvas, his foot dangling over the edge of the ring and almost down into the laps of the press boys.

The referee might have counted up to a thousand for all the difference it made to that young man!

For this few minutes' pleasant work Pitz's champ collected twelve thousand berries. Yet there wasn't a word out of him or a smile in him during our trip back across the Jersey meadows in his big Duplex Twin. Bundled up in his sweater Windsor lolled back on the cushions of the rear seat, grunting an answer when any of the gym bunch spoke to him.

"Listen," he said to Pitz when we were halfway out on the Hudson on board a ferry, "you, Mr. O'Grady and the boys hop off at Times Square. I've got a date up in Stamford and if I don't show up for two or three days don't be sending no plain-clothes detectives out looking for me. There's a—er—there's a certain business matter I've got to take care of up there."

Pitz looked at me.

"What are you trying to get away with—grand larceny?" he growled. "What business have *you* got up in Stamford?"

"My business ain't your business!" Windsor snarled. "As long as I'm not fighting with some one and gypping you out of your sixty per cent, you should get inquisitive. Just drop off at the Square and don't be asking no more questions!"

We did this at Longacre, watching Windsor's bus disappear up Bunk Boulevard. Looie Pitz sighed like a steam whistle.

"If this ain't monkey business," he said, "I can fall overboard without getting wet! I hope he ain't going to shoot himself or nothing because him and his strife are on the outs. What could be worse than doing the Dutch in a place like Stamford?" He looked at his watch. "It's only a little after one bell. What do you say we nudge one of the cabarets, Joe? Being worried like this I need a stimulant. Maybe I can get an angle on some dive where they serve it in a glass."

"Let's look in on Ottie," I suggested. "He's three blocks farther on up the pipe line."

"That's a swell idea; I'll get Yvonne aside and tell her there's too much at stake to be ruined by a steak! I don't believe in trying to fling a husband and wife together after they've hurled each other apart but me being Left Hook's manager makes it different. That ain't no apple sauce, is it?"

We wended a way up the boulevard and entered the Broadway Flower Gardens. The first thing I thought, once we gave our floggers and skimmers to the legalized bandits at the coat-room wicket, was that the orchestra had tied their instruments up in blankets. Really, the music they made was about one nineteenth as loud as usual.

"This is one of them quiet caves, ain't it?" Pitz chuckled as we went through the foyer and into the star parlor.

Once there we both received an explanation. Not only were the musicians conspicuous by their absence, the music made by a portable phonograph on a table, but the crowd had melted to scarce a dozen and there was only one couple dancing on the floor. At least, some one might have called it dancing but it looked more like the mad whirl of a weary snail than anything else.

"Where's the boss?" I asked the knowing waiter Ottie had gotten information from on the day he had first talked business with Sigmund Flannagan.

"Upstairs in the little ballroom," was the answer. "This is a big night here, pal. You might not know it but that dame out on the floor is after the marathon dance record. She's gone forty hours straight and it looks like she's got the country tied."

"The marathon dance record?" Looie Pitz said. "I know it ain't soup but what is it?"

"Listen to this Indian club!" a bystander in a form-fitting suit sneered. "Why don't you gamble the pennies once in a while and buy a newspaper," he went on, directing his remarks at Pitz. "Don't you know nothing? This here is the new craze and I've got six bucks that says Miss Markowitz hands it to Cleveland and that Ohio gal who did fifty-six hours on a copper tray!"

The waiter gave us another look and explained. It seemed that in various parts of the country the boys and girls were out fox trotting and waltzing the hours away in the hope of lasting long enough to hang up a new endurance record. Just at present it appeared that some Cleveland flapper had beaten out New York and that the rest of civilization was after her like a beagle on the trail of a rabbit. We were thrown in the know and wised to the fact that the young lady we were looking at was one of the instructors at the Gardens and was standing at even money to beat out the rest of the record seekers.

Pitz swallowed it all and looked dumfounded.

"What does it mean in round numbers?" he asked the waiter. "Outside of blisters on her heels what does she get?"

"Mr. Scandrel has promised her fifty bucks if she makes good," was the answer.

Looie looked at me.

"Fifty bucks? If she goes fifty hours that's a dollar an hour! A dollar an hour —c'mon, Joe. Let's look up Ottie and get a point on this."

The little ballroom was on the second floor. It was used for the bashful beaus and belles who desired private lessons. As we approached it we heard the tin-can blast of another phonograph. Inside, there were about twenty men and a few of the frail sex scattered around. In the back of the room was a blackboard where a lot of numbers had been chalked up and revolving in the exact center of the floor itself was a well-built young man who was minus his collar, tie and vest.

This individual was no one else but Ottie Scandrel himself!

"He's doing it too!" Looie Pitz bawled. "Hey, Ottie! Come in out of there and behave!"

At this a husky gentleman in a delicate pink silk shirt blew up and handed us a glare.

"Lay off this rowdyism!" he stuttered. "Where do you two think you are—down in Chinatown? The boss has got the dance marathon record sewed up! He's gone fifty-four hours and he'll knock that Ohio record for a trip to Spain if roughnecks like you don't work out your comedy on him!"

"Give us a steer on Mrs. Windsor and where she's at," Pitz cut in, "and we won't be kidding around watching a guy who could have been a champ making a tramp out of himself!"

"There's no one here by that name," the baby in the pink silk shirt cried.

"Mademoiselle Fifi!" I translated.

"Oh—her!" we were informed. "She ain't here no longer. Miss Markowitz has got her place now."

With another request for less noise he went back to the side lines. Left Hook Windsor's manager sighed again. By this time Scandrel's pace had gotten down to a walk and it was only when some one rushed in from another room to say a pair of dancing fools down in Texas were hanging up a new mark that Ottie quickened his pace.

"Let's shove off!" Pitz mumbled. "This is pitiful!"

Just before we took the atmosphere I looked back at my boy friend who was playing solitaire with the latest fox trot. Scandrel couldn't have been more goofy if he'd been hitting the pipe for a week. His mouth was as wide open as the Panama Canal, his eyes were half shut and every now and then he'd give the crowd a laugh by swinging around and making a pass with his hands—as if he was getting a pasting in the ring. We reached the door as one of the gang at the ringside, with a clock in his hand, bawled out another hour and up it went on the blackboard like a score at a ball game!

Several days after the country had been informed via the press that the former Battling Scandrel, box fighter and ex-screen star, had broken the record for the dancing marathon by going fifty-seven hours flat, he buzzed me and a while later I was parked beside him in the foyer of the Broadway Flower Gardens.

Scandrel looked none the worse for wear. The grind had knocked off a few pounds but he stood it without any bones showing and was no more egotistical about his feat than if he had caused Niagara Falls to run backward.

"How about the superiority of the speaker sex now, Joe?" he chuckled. "Did you read all that hop in the papers the other afternoon? I guess Pavlowa is feeling pretty sick, what?"

"One thing I didn't read was what happened to Mrs. Windsor," I murmured.

Ottie snapped a speck of dust off the sleeve of the light gray suit.

"We—er—that is—me and Yvonne had an argument. It was like this, Joe. I got thinking about matrimony and a lawyer who owed me twenty dollars for the past year. Well, this lawyer asked me to take out the twenty in services so I had him up here to chew the rag with Yvonne about him getting a divorce for her from that pinhead husband of hers. Honest, she went up in the air, give me a terrific lacing and then walked out on me. I ain't seen her since. But am I worrying? Drop me a line on that! I don't take nothing from no wren. Anyhow, give me the brunettes every time—you can trust them where a blonde will get away with murder and that reminds me. I sold this here emporium less than an hour ago to a party named Fishbaum."

"Sold it?" I echoed.

Scandrel grinned carelessly.

"You heard me! I only got three thousand cash but I had to make a quick turnover because I'm leaving to-morrow afternoon for Los Angeles. I—er—I'm going to start a movie company out there and star my future wife in pictures——"

"Future wife!" I interrupted.

Ottie tossed me a nod

"You've got swell ears. Future wife is correct. She's Priscilla Joy whom I already introduced to you and coming right down to it I must have been crazy with the heat to ever have imagined it was Yvonne and not Priscilla who was all set to sew the buttons on my clothes."

He was still raving about Mademoiselle Joy when the foyer door opened and Looie Pitz rushed in, waving a telegram. A couple of other people were behind him but we took no notice of them—then.

"Equal this one if you can," Pitz hollered. "Chick and Yvonne have kissed, made up and buried the hatchet. This telegram explains everything. That night after the fight Chick breezed up to Stamford, met Yvonne and they immediately started one of these dizzy dance marathons of their own. According to this message they've just finished clicking off sixty hours even—a new world's record!"

"That's a lot of blah!" Scandrel bellowed. "You got——"

"Just a minute!" a voice interrupted. "Take that noise outside or I'll have you pinched for disorderly conduct in *my* resort!"

Showing symptoms of excitement Sigmund Flannagan pushed a way up to Ottie's side. Six inches behind him was a little bird with cheaters and a full set of lace curtains dangling from his pan.

*"Your place!"* Scandrel shrieked. "You're crazy!"

"Like a raven!" Flannagan shot back. "You sold the Gardens to my brother-in-law—Milton Fishbaum. And not ten minutes ago Milton sold them back to me for the same price he paid you. That's business!"

"I'll break you in half and throw your ribs down the air shaft!" Scandrel yelped. "I'll massage the back of your nut with a broken bottle——"

Sigmund Flannagan grinned.

"I dare you!" he retorted. "I not only dare you but I beg you to! This here gentleman," he said, indicating the bespectacled party beside him, who had nodded at everything Flannagan said, "is my lawyer and if you lay the weight of a finger on me I'll sue you for damages that will keep you broke for the rest of your life! Go ahead—punch me in the nose, you big thug, you low-life!"

So much for that.

Five minutes after this pleasant little exchange of badinage Pitz, Ottie and myself were on the celebrated pavements of Broadway.

"I know where I can find sympathy and I ain't referring to no dictionary neither!" Scandrel moaned. "Follow me, pals! There's a kick left in this night yet!"

We piled into a taxi and were rolled smartly down the Alley. The cab stopped at the front door of the Hotel Neuritis. We galloped through the lobby and into an elevator that rushed us up to the tenth floor. There Ottie picked out a certain door and leaned against the bell.

The door opened and framed the willowy figure of Priscilla Joy.

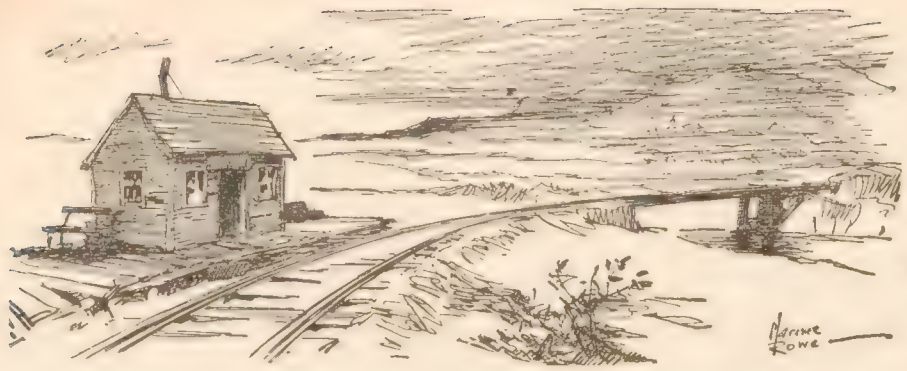
"Baby," Scandrel barked; "leave me come in with my friends. I just now took a clout in the jaw and a hook to the basket that has made me a little groggy. The three of us can help you pack——"

The eye massage in the doorway smiled sadly.

"Listen, Ottie," she purred. "I'm terrible sorry to disappoint you but I've changed my mind about going out to the coast. As my husband all you offer me is a job in the movies whereas Sigmund Flannagan promised I'd be the star dancing attraction at the Broadway Flower Gardens if I took *him.* So I—er—thought it over carefully and—hold your hat—Sig and I were made one at two this afternoon."

*Woof!*

*Another Montanye story in the next number.*



# The Agent at Ghost Station

By Calvin Johnston

*Author of "Rule G," "Thread of Destiny—Three Spools," Etc.*

**The boomer brakeman travels as far as he cares to go—which wasn't far.**

"A MAN of settled habits was Superintendent Flaherty of the P. D., Plains Division," explained the crossing watchman to his friend the boomer brakeman as they sat together in the shade of the shanty and looked over the yards basking silver and black in the summer sunshine. The brakeman frowned uneasily, understanding that himself could easily be made to appear to disadvantage by any narrative of a man like this Flaherty who doubtless stayed in one spot and minded his business.

"I admit, cap, that I go booming round the country a good deal," he replied deliberately, more or less offended; "but I've knowed men who stayed on one job all their lives and was broke the day before pay day same as I am now." He brooded over the negotiations for a loan of six bits which might be endangered by his companion's moralizing, but concluded: "Still, if you feel you got to show me up by tellin' all about this Flaherty who had settled habits——"

"'Tis only by way of entertainment I am telling you the story," replied the watchman composedly; "for in case you cannot borrow the six bits from me 'twould interest you to learn how Flaherty's boomer nephew Barney came a-borrowing, and settled down himself on being refused a loan."

The brakeman shook his head dubiously, but the crossing watchman, figuring that the other in his extremity would compromise on a loan of two bits, and glad of an audience at this price, continued cheerfully.

'Twas lucky for the peace of mind of everybody that Superintendent Flaherty, with his grizzly-bear disposition, was never long in one place at one time. For y'understand the settled habit of a superintendent on the Plains Division, with the far end of it tilting up among the mountains, was to be fanning the grades morning, noon and night between wreck and washout and other points where Grief flagged the operating end.

But while divil a man who knew him objected that the superintendent should move on as fast and far as possible, 'twas called a pity that his nephew Barney should choose to boom about the country when he had the privilege of remaining in one place and making every person there happy.

A tall gossoon with a polite manner and a wide silent laugh was Barney when one October day he presented himself at the Barlow headquarters and bowed elegantly to Flaherty. "God save you, uncle," he said. "It is me, Barney, who has come to visit you and wish you well and go into winter quarters in the switch shanty or station house. I have traveled a thousand miles to get here," he said, "but the hardship was nothing; blood is thicker than water and I am not one to neglect a generous relative."

"Neglect me and I will be happy," replied Flaherty with a snarl; but Barney shook his head.

"You speak too late," he explained, "for I am already here to give whatever aid is necessary in running the yard or station, and have brought honorable discharges from fourteen railroads, including the two service letters from yourself. Divil a railroad man before me," he said with admiration, "is so well traveled and informed." And taking a blank application from the desk he began filling it in with his name, age, and periods of service on the fourteen railroads.

"Twice have I taken you on," said the superintendent, "only to have you resign."

"Whist, uncle," explained Barney with the wide silent laugh of him; " 'twas only after the call of spring had reached me and the foreman had threatened to have me arrested for trespass—and me on the pay roll at the time. Sure, you would not want it said you kept me on as a company pensioner."

"Fourteen jobs in six years," muttered Flaherty with indignation. "It is too much."

" 'Tis only a railroad which objects to a traveled employee," said Barney. "However, if you would rather grubstake me than hire me——"

"Is it lend my money to a boomer!" exclaimed Flaherty with violence.

"But what can we do? Blood is thicker than water," said Barney, and his uncle began pacing up and down. Wildly at first and then more quietly, and shooting an evil glance from under his brows.

"You are right, nephew," he said at last, and laughed like the screech of a brakeshoe before a wreck. "Already I have the job picked out which will suit you much better for the winter than traveling on the money I might lend you."

He rubbed his hands and Barney reflected: "Sure, it is hypocrisy uncle is giving me, or he would not be so pleased," and meets him halfway by bowing politely.

"And in the spring if you choose to move on, you may do so with my blessing. It is not unlikely," hinted Flaherty pleasantly, "that transportation will be provided for you in the spring as far or farther than you care to go, so that you will not have to ride the blind baggage or in dirty cabooses while traveling."

"Glory be," smiled Barney, not to be outdone in hypocrisy, and inquired the nature of the job.

"It is agent at Ghost Station," answered Flaherty, and as Barney, not much liking the name, bit his lip, the superintendent congratulated him on securing cozy winter quarters where he could not spend his salary. "Human society has been the ruin of you, Barney," he said kindly, "but at Ghost Station you will have only nature for a neighbor, and Mike McGore, the retired engineer who farms for his health in the valley near by."

Barney reflected: "Ghost Station, and nature, and Mike McGore who is not human society! Faith, I do not like the combination at all—and me a man used to the good cheer of life. I had better resign the job in advance."

But, as old Flaherty explained, it was that job or hitting the hummer. "True, blood is thicker than water," he said, "but do not push me too far," and Barney, being in desperate want, laughed and agreed with him.

"Agent I will be then, at Ghost Station," he said, "but there is one point I would like to bring up again. You spoke of furnishing me transportation when I resigned in the spring——"

"It will be furnished, Barney."

"To carry me as far as I wanted to go," Barney went on; "and so far, so good. But you said it might carry me farther than I wanted to go, which has an uneasy sound to a man who must get aboard at Ghost Station."

"Is it up to me," asked Flaherty with astonishment, "not only to furnish you transportation, but to tell you when you have traveled far enough?"

Of course there was only one answer to that, for it stood to reason that since Barney knew enough to get aboard he would know when to get off; and yet deep down in the proposition was the joker over which the superintendent rubbed his hands.

"Of course it is a condition that you will hold the job till relieved in the spring," he said, and Barney, agreeing, was given a trip pass to his station in the foothills at the western end of the division.

" 'Twill be a pleasant change to you after so much traveling, to sit quietly for six months and watch time and the world go by," said Flaherty, the hard face of him

cracking with a bitter grin. "There is no siding there, no telegraph to disturb you with train orders; no traveler, no train, not even the crows stop there, except once a week the chain gang will unload from the local supplies for the smelters back in the mountain."

As Barney listened his blood ran cold at thought of staying six months in one place where even the crows do not stop, and then, the west-bound passenger whistling up the yard, Flaherty escorted him to the platform and put him aboard with a "God bless ye" and a bitter grin.

It was in the gray of the following morning that Barney found himself on the platform of his station, wondering half asleep at the neat new depot in that wilderness place. Just beyond him was a bridge and he walked out on it to look at the small river which pours out of the mountain range thirty miles away to wind among the hills of the plateau. A mile below the bridge, where the valley of the stream widened, he saw a house, the only sign of inhabitants. "That will be the farm of neighbor O'Gore, the retired engineer," he said with satisfaction. "Many's the visit we will have together in the long winter days and evenings."

Returning to the depot to introduce himself as relief to the agent he found the door locked, and when he rapped was attacked from behind. Then the door opened and a man came out with a stick in his hand. "I thought you were Mr. McGore," said the man, and drove off the goat who had battered Barney against the wall.

"I am your relief," said Barney, and the other, grabbing him by the arm, hurried him inside and locked the door.

" 'Tis against the goat," he explained, and having finished dressing in a minute threw his belongings into a suit case, all the while keeping his club at hand and watching Barney closely. He was a thin pale man with a wild look, and when he had packed, he danced a jig. "Look at me jig," he said, "as light as a dead leaf; yet when I came here I was as big as a buffalo. It is a place for a man to come who wants to reduce, to dwindle and waste away. Now, Relief, I put you in possession and if you try to escape and leave the station on my hands it will be over my dead body. Stand aside!" and waving his club he unlocked the door.

"Never a chance have I got to escape," explained Barney, "having promised my uncle, the superintendent, to stay till spring. So you can take time to instruct me in the duties."

"The first duty is to club O'Gore," said the agent; "and then if you do not mind the wind which comes down the mountain to yell in the rocks, and the stillness and desolation, and the conscience which gets at you for all you have done and all you have not done, you will be a happy man and wax fat." He danced on the threshold. "Light as a leaf," he said, "and I was built like a hippopotamus when I came to Ghost Station."

"And why is the name?" asked Barney, and added: "Though it is true that ghosts as such have little terror for the Flahertys, who kept a family banshee for three generations in the castle in Ireland."

"You kept a ghost in the castle," said the retiring agent with contempt, as if it was a small matter, "but did the castle itself ever appear and then vanish and go haunting other parts of the country where it had no business at all? I see it did not. But some morning you will wake up and discover that your station is missing. Do not let it worry you," he said, "for by that time you will be reduced to a ghost yourself, between O'Gore and the goat and desolation and conscience. Look at me; light as a leaf jigging on the wind, who could weigh in as an elephant eight months agone." And with that he jigs down the platform, only stopping to warn: "Every day I would give the goat exercise and food or he will be butting and gnawing the cases of dynamite in the wareroom," and is gone down the track to catch the train at the next station, so that Barney cannot choose but remain on the job.

"Divil a wild one like him have I seen among agents," reflected Barney, looking after him and wondering what life at Ghost Station must be. Then he began at once to test the sanity of the goat.

"Ba-a," he said, pawing the platform. "Look me in the eye, you old assassin." But the goat muttered in his beard, and following his glance Barney saw a young woman at the end of the platform watching them with interest.

" 'Twas a test of sanity," he explained, bowing with his hat in his hand.

"Did you pass it?" asked the young woman.

"Ba-a," answered Barney in a spirit of repartee, but the young woman sighed gravely.

"You have come to the right place for a crazy person," she said. "I suppose you have relieved the agent who thought he was a dead leaf."

"I am Barney Flaherty," said the gentleman, thinking the joke had gone far enough, but she looked at him with suspicion.

"You are sure it is not Napoleon Bonaparte? Well, I will humor you and say Mr. Flaherty. And I am still Miss Katy O'Gore."

"And who do you expect to be?" asked Barney, already jealous of the dark-haired girl whose blue eyes had the fairy's dirty finger mark beneath them.

"Faith, I am expecting to be Queen Cinderella any day," she explained, and Barney shuddered at the grim manner of her, with a little wildness about it. She set down a bottle and pail she carried. "Here is the milk and eggs and butter which I suppose you will be wanting, Napoleon," she said, and, raising her hands as if straightening a crown on her head, walked away with majesty. The goat muttered again in his chin whisker and bucked with all four feet in the air.

"You, too!" said Barney, and feeling a queer wild wish to mutter in answer and go bucking about the platform, he seized on the pail and bottle and hurried into the depot, shutting the door behind him.

"I will not lock it," he told himself firmly, but while he was cooking breakfast, kept watch over his shoulder lest the lonesomeness outside should break in on him unaware.

Not a sound was there that day in the foothills except when a train would swish through, and yet Barney's fear of the lonesomeness gradually wore away as he smoked his pipe and gazed down the valley. "Never did I see such a colleen as Katy," he reflected; and not only did he mean the soft dusky hair and sweet face of her, but the strange majesty of her walk and gesture of straightening the crown as a queen. "And if she is a little bit queer," he said, " 'tis all the luckier for me—and she may come to have a high regard for me."

He thought that Katy, when she came again with the milk, might glance in the window or door of the depot, so he swept out the waiting room which was partitioned off from the wareroom end, and made up his cot in the corner neatly and hung his garments under a curtain of tarpaulin. Then he scoured and washed his pans, bringing water from the river, and was busy with laundry work till the goat came through the door of the wareroom carrying a stick of dynamite from a broken case.

"It is the first time," reflected Barney, going out among the hills, "that I have not wished to travel far and wide, which I will surely do an' I keep that anarchist in the household." And after the goat had eaten the dynamite, he returned filled with resentment.

"It is the parting of the ways," Barney explained; and marveling that he who loved companionship would not cling to the goat in such a place, he bade him begone with a threat of the club. The goat, understanding there was nothing in common between them, started muttering down the track and never looked back.

"You are a man after my own heart," said a bulky red-faced man who had come up the valley and witnessed the parting. "Now, a dog or a locomotive is a man's companion by nature, but a goat is only the playmate of witches and divils—am I right? You are dommed right I'm right," said the red-faced man.

"He had gone crazy and was eating the dynamite in the wareroom," explained Barney, "and was the last companion for a man who wants to settle down in one place."

"Full of dynamite and traveling like a trackwalker; sorrow to the engineer who hits him for a living torpedo," said the other; and a train whistling, the two of them watched down the track with interest. But the goat stepped aside to let the train pass and with a last toss of his head for his enemies at Ghost Station, marched on again.

"The old agent who kept him for company was bewitched," said the red-faced man. "I am Michael O'Gore—and am I right?—you're——"

"Faith, he is always right," groaned Barney who liked to assert himself in argument, but dare not do so with the father of Katy. All afternoon he agreed with everything said by Michael, who grew the more extravagant in his statements and stories, and at last, without drawing a single contradiction or argument went home with indignation.

"A poor poltroon is Flaherty, the new agent," he told Katy, "who will not declare himself or dispute what any one else declares."

"It is too bad," she answered with sympathy, for she knew now that the social pleasure of Ghost Station was ruined for Michael, used to the exciting contradictions of the former agent who backed himself with a goat and a shillalah. "But you can expect little spirit in a man who would take a job here at all unless he was crazy," said Katy.

"Maybe I can drive him crazy," said Michael, desperate with the prospect of a long winter and no one to quarrel with.

And the pains he went to with Barney should have upset the reason of any man, but Barney could see in the old tyrant of the locomotive cab only the father of Katy. Never by look or word would he signify doubt or contradict statements which he could not have heard without frenzy another time. The winter deepened, the snows came; smelter supplies ceased to be shipped in as the freighters could not haul them over the drifted roads. Yet with only Michael and his daughter for companions Barney the rover was content.

Often he visited his neighbors to carry down the mail or weekly paper which the trackwalker would bring from the station ten miles below; or on the days of the big snows, to shovel and sweep paths in Katy's barnyard. And for all this Michael, being retired with asthma, gave him countenance, though despising him as a poltroon who would neither speak an opinion of his own nor dispute anybody else's opinion.

Barney gave him not a thought, having no room in his brain except for dreams of Katy. And once in January and again in February, when he believed he had made progress in her good graces, he hinted that he had at last come to the end of his roving. And both times, meeting his look fairly, Katy made believe to be straightening the crown on her head and answered, "Yes, yes, Napoleon!" with a queer grim smile which did not encourage him to go on.

'Twas the last night of February. He sat in the station brooding over her strange treatment and for the first time conscious of the yell of the wind like that of the wild pack and the slash of sleet at the windows; and though he made the station room bright with lanterns and a roaring fire in the stove a mortal lonesomeness crept in. In terror, he recalled all the old rollicking days on the road, and laughed and said: "Well, I can travel again when spring comes, if Katy will have none of me; sure, all the world outside is ready to welcome a good fellow——" and at the moment a whistle roars beyond the bridge, a train rolls in and Superintendent Flaherty enters out of the night.

He strode forward with a nod and stood moody, staring into the fire; when he spoke it was not with the sarcasm or edge of temper which made him the terror of his division, but quietly. "I was going through on my special from the mountain end," he said, "when I remembered that you had kept this job five months. I never would have believed it. You have settled down. Throw your traps on the special; I will try you again in Barlow."

Barney, with the panting of the waiting locomotive in his ears and beam of headlight slanting past his window on the path to his old haunts of freedom and fellowship, whirled to the corner. He took his clothes from the wall and was folding them into his battered suit case; his heart beat high at thought of escaping the loneliness which had wrapped him like the grave that evening.

Then he, who during all his manhood had recked nothing of the present, because fun and change and friends always waited on the road ahead, was stricken with a dreadful consciousness—that no matter where he roved, through plains or mountains or cities, the lonesomeness which had gripped him this night would follow unless Katy were along.

"Well—a train is being held," said the superintendent.

"I am not going," said Barney, and there being no other explanation to offer: "I will stay on till spring as I promised."

"And I promise you will take a journey then," exclaimed Flaherty. As if forgetting the discussion he stared into the fire again, while Barney was curiously reminded of the superintendent's old promise that he should have transportation to carry him farther than he wanted.

"Three times in seven years," said Flaherty, "Ghost Station has disappeared. This track and bridge should have been built twenty feet higher, y'understand. Five years ago the river washed out track and the two bridges—you will recall it curves.

down this valley and the road crosses it again ten miles below—every year the management is going to raise the level but trusts to luck that the snowfall will be light in the mountains. The two bridges are strong and have held four years even though flooded; but this year they will go with the tracks. We have been fighting blockades all winter; never have there been such snows in the mountains and foothills. Well, you are staying on till relieved, Barney? I wish you a pleasant voyage in May."

Barney threw back his head with his wide silent laugh. "I will stay till relieved, superintendent, or the transportation is furnished."

Flaherty stepped aboard, the conductor's lantern was raised and Barney watched the flying tail lights vanish into the black distance.

Next day he told Katy of his uncle's visit, and she studied him with pity. "You had the chance to escape Ghost Station and refused?" she said. "You are crazy with the lonesomeness and Mr. Flaherty should have had the train crew seize on you."

Now, often she had made a joke of living here but this was the first time she broke out in real despair and bitterness. "But, Katy, you have your new cottage and little farm which will be planted this spring; and your father for company," urged Barney, astonished.

"May the saints forgive me, I should be content," exclaimed Katy. "And I am content," she declared fiercely, gazing from the cottage yard at the lowering March sky and bleak hills.

"You have a friend too," said Barney, "who is content to be near you even in this wilderness spot, and the reason I could not go away is because lonesomeness would follow me to all other places where you were not."

For once the girl did not call him Napoleon and straighten her crown as if they were both crazy, but turned on him a steady glance and answered him earnest for earnest. "Do you call it honest to keep trying to make me care for such a man as yourself at a time like this? Because I am half mad with loneliness and eager for any company you come offering me a good for nothing, a pensioner on his uncle, the agent at Ghost Station for a—a sweetheart! You know you're not acting honorably in trying to blarney me into caring for a man I'd be too proud to notice if there were friends to turn to."

When Barney tried to interrupt, she halted him. "I know what you would say—don't say it! Don't ever say it! For I'm not going to let the storms and desolation bully me into listening to words which must come from a worthier man than Barney Flaherty—or never be spoken at all."

With this Katy, leaving him standing in the dooryard, retired into the house, and Barney meditated over the names she had called him. "Never a Flaherty has stood so much from anybody as I have from the O'Gores," Barney told himself; "bad cess to them for fault-finding neighbors," and resolved to keep proudly to himself.

So he did thereafter, except for the daily trip after his milk and eggs; and the pride of him when meeting old Michael or Katy at their door with a stern face and eyes fixed over their heads would have brought him much applause among the ancestors of the castle in Glengarry, which he had mentioned.

And yet at Ghost Station, brooding by his smoldering fire, whether at noon or dead of night, he began to hear the mutter of a voice in the great silence, and though it was strange at first, by close attention for weeks he was able to identify it. "Sure, this is the voice of conscience which the old agent warned me against," he said, and at last tried to drown it out by singing and dancing and beating on the walls, till he saw that the two neighbors in the house down the valley had come out to gaze.

"Bad cess to the O'Gores; they will gossip that I am queer," he said, and though tempted to explain to them that he is Napoleon, decided it was best not to, lest the place get a bad name.

So after that he remained quiet, and O'Gore, who had hurried up the valley at the uproar, to start an argument, returned home disappointed. And Barney listened to the voice of conscience which did not rebuke him so much for the things he had done as for all the things he had not done.

"It might be Katy herself talking to me," he reflected, for conscience, talking louder and longer, showed him no mercy at all, till by April he was nagged into the low state of the former agent and would have fled out of the country in distraction, but dared not leave Katy O'Gore at the mercy of the flood, after the superintendent's prophecy.

"If the river takes the station it will take the farmhouse too," he reflected, for stubborn old Michael had built below the high-water mark, in spite of the warning of Flaherty.

Now the spring sun came on, not a cheerful blessing, but a threat, and as the snow melted Barney took a strange hatred of the river, watching it by the hour from the bridge and prowling along its bank for miles. And his hatred was not so much because it threatened a flood as because it traveled on and on instead of staying in one place like a lake.

"A curse on it for a rover—a boomer from which no good ever comes, as conscience has explained to me," said Barney. And now that he had become a settled man, a great desire to fight it out with the restless river, if it rose after his station, grew up in him.

A little at a time it crept up over the shingle bars and the boulders in its bed, and Barney listened to the mutter which drowned out the voice of conscience. By day he stalked his enemy along the bank and at night slept with his hearing strained for any new note of threat or warning; he was gaunt and his hair was wild and he moved like a man under a spell.

The dancing gleam had gone from his eye, which was cold and mysterious as the gray gleam on the river, and instead of laughing his wide silent laugh he grinned angrily with outthrust jaw.

Sometimes Katy observing the change in him was disturbed with remorse. "He has been used to cheerful company and excitement, hunting them to the world's end," she told her father, "and now the solitude is breaking his spirit."

"He is a poltroon," answered old O'Gore, "who can neither make good out in the world among other men or hold his own here where there is no competition."

"We will not dispute," said Katy to his great disappointment, but thought to herself: "Sure, I am a fellow prisoner in the solitude with this Barney Flaherty, and understand why he walks the bank of the river even as I do, envying its freedom and wishing its waves would bear me away. But maybe he is brooding over the scolding I gave, and I have no right to add to his troubles."

After a time she said: "Not because I am interested at all in the good for nothing who is content with being agent at Ghost Station, for I do not like him and wish he would go away and am sorry he ever came —but I will ask him to dinner."

"What is the use?" asked O'Gore. "There are no more snow drifts to shovel out of the yard."

"A human voice might soothe him," explained Katy, "and it is better to endure even such as him for once than to have him go crazy on our hands."

When Old Michael quarreled she did not answer or even hear him, but went outside as she often did to gaze up the valley at the man pacing the river bank. "Such a dancing light he had in his gray eye, and a fine manner," said Katy soberly, "and could be a man among men. It is a wonder I did not care for him at all," and the tears coming to her eyes she confessed: "Katy O'Gore, you do care for him; sorrow the day he came to this valley where I would soon have been contented." But though Katy regretted the scolding she had given the weakling who had gone to pieces before it her pride never would stand for him as a lover.

A Sunday afternoon in April, never forgotten up and down the valley and Plains Division, Barney was invited to dine with his neighbors.

The snow had gone from the foothills, still spongy and throwing off rills of ice water; the river, half full, talked to itself, and Barney, talking back to it, looked at the far white, westward ranges and at the wet lowering sky. He walked down the bank all the way to the O'Gore cottage, and as he turned aside shook his fist. "Threaten and warn, ye blaggard," he told the river. "The time has come for you to make good or quit." He felt in his bones that the river was after him, laughing, and he had racked his brain till it was worn out entirely for means of fighting back, and found none. Yet he swore: "I am done booming and no boomer shall push me out of my tracks though I drown in them."

It was swearing so to himself that he came to dinner, and he sat still eating lightly and speaking few words to the quarreling Michael and sympathetic Katy, but listening to something beyond them.

And the conversation died down to only a word occasionally and then to none at all, and the hosts in alarm listened along of their guest. "Faith—I knew it would come

to this; we are all crazy," thought Katy, and at the moment came the sound of a great raindrop bursting on the windowpane.

"Hark," said Barney; " 'tis like the sunset gun on doomsday;" and rose to his feet. "The warm rain is coming, with the hills soaked and the snow still deep in the mountains." He told them of the superintendent's prophecy but old Michael laughed at him for a poltroon, and Katy listened in sympathy for his fears.

But Barney, reflecting on the river, slowly thrust out his jaw and his eyes were cold and dark and mysterious. "It is certain," he told himself suddenly, aloud, "that no dommed boomer can push me from my tracks if I drown in them." And with his pie in one hand and a look so fierce that even Michael was silenced, Barney shook hands with both his hosts. "Let it come," he said. "Remember I am here. And now I must be back at my post."

So he left them without his wide laugh or bow of politeness for the dinner. "Still he is a man of courtesy though frightened," said Katy, peering after through the window, "and carried the pie off in his hand."

"He is not quite a poltroon who will eat it," snarled Michael, with hope of a quarrel even with Katy.

She did not answer, and keeping watch up the vale saw a train stop after a time and then a number of men at the station.

"It is a bridge gang," explained her father, who, as an old engineer, understood that the warm spring rain was bringing down the snows of the mountains in avalanches of water. Still he laughed at the warning of Superintendent Flaherty, because the river had not reached the level of the farm except once. "I knew what I was doing when I built here last summer," he said. "Such a flood will not come again in my time, which the doctor places at five years. Am I right? You are dommed right I'm right!"

And Katy, agreeing with him, presently pointed up the valley where a flame had broken out in the dusk of the clouded day.

"Sure, the loon has set fire to his station," said Michael with enjoyment of the excitement, and the two of them, slipping on their raincoats against the light-dropping rain, went forward a distance to see better what was going on.

The gang which had just arrived were already scattered along the bridge inspecting, though there was little they could do but maybe strengthen the abutments or if the river rose so high try to keep the drift from lodging. But if the bridge men were loitering more as spectators than actors, Barney Flaherty was working at the station as a man full of purpose.

"He has built a bonfire on the other side of the track," said Michael, "and is I believe holding incantation over it." Filled with curiosity the two pushed on to the station platform and watched the agent heap up the fire with trunks of dead trees and old ties and presently drag out the three rails kept for emergency in the wareroom. Only when the rails were balanced across the roaring fire did Barney hasten over to relieve the curiosity of his neighbors.

"I am heating them," he explained.

"Is it so," said Michael, "and for what reason?"

"So they will bend and I can make a loop in the middle," he answered; and for the first time in weeks it seemed to Katy that gaunt and shaggy as he was, the old dancing humor was in his eyes. " 'Tis a technical measure I am taking," said Barney, "to fight the river to a standstill." And with that he went back and picked up the end of a rail which bent of its own weight as he dragged it out; then wedging this end between two boulders, he crossed the other end over it, making a figure eight open at one end.

By the time he had bent the third rail the bridge foreman had come up to sit on the pile of tackle which had been unloaded from the train on to the platform. And the three of them in silence watched Barney drag his three figure eights across the track to the platform and place them particularly at three corners. "I will make bold, Mr. Foreman," he said, "to borrow some of the rope you have brought along."

"Take it and welcome," said the foreman; "for all the tackle in the world would not save this bridge against the flood on the way."

Again the three in silence watched Barney measure off three twenty-foot pieces of rope; he tied each piece to one of his figure eights and lashed the other end around a cleat spiked to the platform. Then, regarding his work with pleasure, he said that it was always best not to give rails bent into figure eights more than twenty feet of tether. The foreman nodded and Michael laughed hoarsely.

A shout rose from the men gathered at the end of the bridge and though twilight was falling the four could see the first real wave of the mountain flood like a shaggy yellow monster floundering down the channel.

And watching it, Barney leaned forward fascinated, and muttered to himself and struck his forehead with impatience of an idea which had half formed. Suddenly there was a staggering burst of rain which to Barney was a second blow and taunt of his enemy. And in the same moment he threw up his face to the blackening sky, laughing his wide silent laugh.

Katy shot him an angry glance. "He has been making sport of us with his bonfire and bent rails," she thought.

"I see now, Mr. Flaherty," she told him, "that my sympathy for you has been wasted. You are only a boomer ready to move on to a new job and new neighbors if we are swept away. And the prospect of going brings back all your good humor. Such is the worthless character of you and can't be helped," said Katy, "but I would think that here along of the foreman who has come to save the bridge and station, you would try to be of help to the company who is paying you, instead of playing jokes like a boy."

"I hear you," interrupted Barney. "You are the voice of conscience. But this is no time to listen to it, with the voice of the enemy calling me out against him. There is the roar of another wave coming down," he said. "Hear it, Michael? You were wrong; am I right? You are dommed right you were wrong!" To the bridge gang who had gathered, he said: "We will help this poor mistaken man and his daughter pitch a camp on the high ground before the river sweeps their house away."

With lanterns lighted the men hurried down the valley and Michael, who would raise his voice to quarrel with them, was silenced by a fierce growl from the river.

With the black rain beating steadily and the flood now on in earnest, Katy and her father trudged with the railroad men. Suddenly it was all confusion and terror to the girl who had no friends but grim shadows in the bleary lantern light and no refuge but the storm-swept ridge. But at the door-yard a clear voice gave orders.

"Two men help the O'Gores pack up; the other eight of us will shoulder the tool shed."

In a moment all was haste but perfect order; inside the house Katy and her assistants dragged out trunks and bags; they piled salvage in the middle of the floors and lashed it in the rugs. One moment she paused to watch the tool shed move past the door. She did not remember much that happened after that, only being conscious that she was one in an organization which packed and carried quietly, as if there was no danger on the way, and no storm beating on them. Then she was seated in the dry, floored tool shed on the ridge, three hundred yards from the house; it was neatly stored with all the small possessions they loved best, and her father and herself seated by the oil heater which Barney himself had carried up. She heard the steps of the men tramping away.

"Wurroo!" She heard the clear voice with the old laugh in it. "The river roars, boys. Well, we will roar back—we will roar it down——" and at something he added the bridge gang yelled with the glee of fighting men on the charge.

"Barney, Barney!" she called after, but he did not answer.

"I have let him go without thanking him," she whimpered; "out into the night—and the danger!"

But Michael laughed her to scorn. "Divil a foot will Barney Flaherty, who has not even a quarrel in him, advance on danger," he said.

The night went on. Michael nodded over the warm stove and slept, but the girl with her chin in her hands and dark hair loose on her shoulders watched through the open door, and listened. She heard the voices of men faintly through the rain, and saw their lanterns twinkling at the station. Then there was but one lantern, and a silence.

Out of the silence broke a new and dreadful note; ever rising the hoarse thunder growl of the river told its wrath at her escape. The mountains had been sluiced by the warm rain and the snow water boiled down in billow on billow; a faint sheen of lightning showed only a waste of water. The farmhouse had gone.

With a startled cry, Katy saw the light at the station moving down, swiftly and more swiftly. "The lantern swung behind the figure of a man, then lightning revealed the station platform and all, riding like a house boat.

"Barney," she called, and whimpered at

the joy of his answer. "Wurroo, Katy," he chanted.

"He is going out," thought the girl. "He is happy; he is on the road again." And as the loneliness came down on her as it had never done before the light halted in midstream. Now the flashes of distant lightning were growing brighter and the breathless watcher glimpsed the man on the house boat at the edge of the platform; then he disappeared and from the flood between them the growl of a hundred beasts mocked her despairing shriek. Drooping, fainting, Katy O'Gore sank down at last, as if the river was Time and she was forever cast away on the shore where she had watched all the blessings of life go down in wreck.

And out of the angry waters and murk and lightning flashes, such a creature of slime and draggled mane and blazing eyes rose up at her threshold that divil at all did the mere recognition of him as Barney Flaherty restore her composure.

"A coat!" said Barney, "if you can find one; 'tis the polar current has broken into that river."

Katy rummaged and found one of old Michael's, who had wakened to gaze with astonishment on the visitor. "The bridge here still holds," said Barney, "though overflowed; and I take it as a sign that the one below where the river curves back to recross the P. D. has not gone out."

"I thought you were drowned," said Katy, but the man paid no attention to her sobbing. Suddenly she hushed with a sort of awe of him, observing that he was not heeding her at all and that he carried his body forward, with muscles tense, as a man coming to strangle holds in a fight to the death.

"He is listening to the river," thought Katy, and shuddered to think of the black and icy death which he had fought and conquered in the depths.

"It roars," said Barney with his wide silent laugh. "But is nothing to the roar I will send back." Buttoning the coat and commandeering the lantern on the floor he ran out along the ridge toward the railroad.

All the long night thereafter was no drowsiness in the O'Gore household, but instead a vigil by the pale flashing lightning. Rising as he had out of the flood and laughing at it like a magician who could order its waves aside to let him pass, Barney had flung down his last words to ring in their ears. And so they watched and listened, ever pondering his mysterious meaning until just before dawn a spark of light, big and red as a meteor, rose and burst far up the river. Then came a gust of air and a quake of earth and a roar as of a storm cloud tearing itself to ribbons.

"'Tis Barney," breathed O'Gore with awe. "'Tis Barney roaring back at the river."

"Saints guard him," whimpered Katy; "for he is the boldest of bold men and would not let an explosion pass without being in the middle of it," and Michael looked at her and nodded and the word "poltroon" died on his lips.

Rigid and mute, they crouched before the open door dreading minute by minute some message of disaster until the dawn slowly streaked the sky under a rifting cloud and the valley appeared.

"Glory be!" said Katy pointing.

"Where is the river?" asked Michael, for beyond a brown stain and pools in the hollows the farm stretched below them; the river though brimming had returned to its banks; and on the site of their own home, now piled up as débris on some distant shoal, stood the depot of Ghost Station where Barney had anchored in the night with his rails bent into figure eights.

An hour had passed since the explosion when they heard the whistle of a locomotive, and they hurried up to the spot where the station had stood. There the track was soft and rails sagging but the light locomotive nosed up close by with its single coach and Superintendent Flaherty and his big boss, the general manager, met the refugees.

"Is it you, O'Gore?" said the manager. "What have you done with the river?"

"Sure, Barney Flaherty roared back at it and it was gone," explained Michael, and paused.

A procession of the dirtiest, most draggled creatures since the Noah family escaped from the flood, was coming up. But little they cared that their bare chests and arms and hands were scarred, and their few garments rags, and their faces bruised so they could hardly see out of their eyes. They staggered up jaunty as boys at Donnybrook who have won an all-night fight with stones and clubs.

"I have to report," said the bridge fore-

man to the superintendent, "that we blew a breach in the ridge above and let the flood water into a gulch which was, I believe, one of the old beds of the river. Sure, it came through like Niagara, and where it went I don't know."

"The flood dropped at the lower bridge," said Flaherty. "The gulch you used as a discharge for the flood water carried it back into the river below. So it saved both bridges."

"You figured this out?" asked the manager of Flaherty.

"Not me, it was the foreman," said the superintendent.

"Not me," said the foreman, "it was Barney, the agent. He used the smelters' dynamite in his wareroom."

"He has the eye of an engineer," said the manager. "What is he doing in such a job?" But the superintendent had spied the depot down the valley.

"It is anchored," Barney answered his question and explained the matter to him.

"Dumb-bell," said the dour superintendent, "why did you not anchor it where it stood on the railroad property?"

"You promised me transportation in it as far as I cared to go," said Barney. His uncle glared and the manager observed with shrewdness:

"There is more to this. Tell me about this man, superintendent." The latter did so, never as an honest man sparing his nephew's feelings; and the manager observed the girl who moved up beside Barney and took his hand and looked on the officials with defiance and anger.

"Barney, you have saved me two bridges," said the manager, and offered to take him into the engineers and have him taught to be——

"I would rather have the depot than the job, sir," said Barney. "You would have to break it up to bring it back and ——"

"You want it to live in? Are you going to turn farmer?"

"It is for my two friends who lost their home to live in, sir," explained Barney.

"It is for all three of us to live in," whispered Katy, with a wild blush, but a steady glance into his face.

"Well, Barney, the P. D. will have to build itself another depot; and you can run the station along with the farm, and when you choose you can have a position worthy your ability," smiled the general manager.

The party passed on to the bridge, leaving the neighbors alone.

"Sure, I was the crazy one and you were Napoleon," said Katy.

"Is she right——" began Michael, but the others, hand clasped in hand, did not know he was there.

*Another story of the railroad by Calvin Johnston in the next number.*

## TELLING IT TO THE LADIES

ENGLAND has a clear right to claim the world's bravest man. He is Doctor Josiah Oldfield, a London physician.

Doctor Oldfield has strong convictions and isn't afraid to express them. One of his convictions is that men are superior to women. Lots of men think that but few would be brave enough to stand up before an audience of women and tell them so. That is what Doctor Oldfield did. Speaking before the International Franchise League he said that man is superior to woman in any line of endeavor from cooking to philosophy. To prove his contention he pointed out that:

Although women have been doing most of the cooking for ages, the best chefs are men.

Although women have been playing the piano for centuries, the best creative musicians are men.

All the great painters were men. Women are imitative, not creative.

More homes have been made miserable by envious women than by brutal men.

Doctor Oldfield finished his address on "The Dominant Sex" by saying that half the miseries of the western world are caused by women fighting against men and that peace in life "depends on women becoming affectionate junior comrades in a copartnership of the sexes."

We wonder what Mrs. Oldfield said when the doctor got home from the meeting and told her all about it.

# Red Pete's Treasure

By John T. Rowland

*Author of "The Blood of His Ancestors," "Labrador Luck," Etc.*

**McCandlish believed in gratitude but not in pushing it too far.**

IT was eastward of the Old Bahama channel they encountered her. "Her" perhaps is not the word. Surely nothing less in the guise of a ship ever sailed one of the seven seas.

Square as a box—not figuratively, you understand, but literally—with two tall, thin masts and a yard slung close under the truck of each, a single huge square sail on each mast and a sort of a jigger stuck up like an afterthought in the stern—a queer-looking craft indeed to find sloshing over the big ground swell of the northeast trades!

Small wonder the crew of the schooner *Eastern Queen* were puzzled.

"If that is real," said Skipper Billy MacNair, "I'll stand treat to the gang when we fetch Dartmouth wharves!" Which was a remarkable pledge for Billy, because he was a Bluenose and teetotal into the bargain.

"Oh, 'tis real enough," mused Tom Reid, his mate, aloud. "But I'm thinkin' now, what will a man be doin' in a craft the like o' that?"

What, indeed? Skipper MacNair was not the man to let idle curiosity get the better of his judgment, ordinarily. He was bound up through Crooked Island Passage, while the stranger quite evidently was heading for the Old Bahama channel, making a fair wind of the brisk easterly breeze which had come with the sun out of a purple dawn. But this thing——

Billy weakened. "I dunno—I dunno but what I'll run down and have a look. It won't cost us more than an hour."

The crew, who to a man were leaning over the *Queen's* high bulwarks, greeted the words with eager interest and the helmsman had already begun to roll his wheel down when the skipper gave him the sign. Then the trig schooner ran off, overhauling the strange, clumsy quarry two feet to one.

MacNair went below to his breakfast; but he ate faster even than was his wont and when he returned to the deck they had come up within a cable length of the stranger, on her starboard quarter.

"'Tis nothing but a scow," the mate greeted him in tones of disgust; "a proper mud scow—with masts set up on her and a couple of old tarpaulins bent on for sails!"

"She ought to have 'Garbage Disposal No. 2' painted on her top strake," the cook offered.

But the skipper raised his glasses and studied the weird vessel earnestly and long. Under an awning which had been rigged above her stern he saw two men. One, the helmsman, did not interest him; but the other was a short spare man dressed in dirty white, who paced back and forth the length of his cramped quarter-deck—if a scow could be said to boast such a thing—and in the intense, level sunlight his tousled bare head glowed like a lighted torch.

There was a touch of awe in the skipper's voice when he lowered his glass. "That is McCandlish, 'Red Pete' McCandlish from Harbor Grace," he said, lingering over the words. "What in the name of the saints will he be up to now?"

Indeed, the mystery had only deepened. It had been sublimated from the mechanical plane to the human as interest turned from the vessel to its master. No man on the *Eastern Queen* would have been likely to put it just that way, yet they realized the essential fact as plainly as you or I.

" 'Strewth, what indeed?" muttered Tom Reid, his Old World strain taking him for once unawares.

As they talked, however, the handsome schooner drew closer to the lumbering scow. A big scow it was, close to a hundred feet long and broad in the usual proportion of such vessels; and it was quite deeply laden, though with the bow higher out of water than the stern to improve its sailing qualities. The hold, of course, was quite open; but of the nature of the cargo they could tell nothing, for a tarpaulin had been drawn over it. Resting on the tarpaulin, however, was something that caught MacNair's eye and held it fascinated—a complete diving outfit, brass helmet, air pump and all.

MacNair let out his breath with a low, husky whistle—a trick he had whenever especially intrigued. Then, "Good morning to you, Pete McCandlish," he sang out.

"The same to you—but ain't there room enough for us both, that ye must run down and steal my wind?" demanded a peppery voice.

The *Eastern Queen's* skipper replied with a certain caution; the vagaries of Red Pete were well known.

"I'll not take it for long," he said; "but seein' your rig I took it ye might need help."

"None!" called the other with a quick gesture as if to push the schooner away. "None whatever. 'Tis my own business I'm minding and I'll thank you to be doing the same!"

"As you say, McCandlish—but 'twas well meant." Still from the top of his own deck house, which of course overtopped the low scow by a dozen feet, MacNair continued to stare; and, furthermore, there had come into his eyes a calculating look to replace the one of sheer wonder.

Four half-naked negroes who comprised the scow's crew lolled about on top of her cargo and stared up at the *Queen's* tall sails. They were of the lowest grade—primitive, stupid plantation hands, by the look, of an intelligence which seems sometimes to fall below that of a good dog. At least, that was the white man's estimate. The fellow at the wheel was a little better—a mulatto perhaps with Spanish or Portuguese blood, one of those queer, indeterminate, tropical products of the ultimate melting down of races. He wore clothes and a straw hat, but his feet were bare. He was a slim, monkeylike little man, intelligent no doubt but without physique. And then there was red-headed McCandlish, pacing now faster than ever and jerking his elbows up and down.

MacNair's brow still was puckered but a thin smile ran over his mouth. Thanks to that diving suit he thought he understood.

"I'll bear away in good time, Pete," he sang out, "but tell me now, there's a good fellow, what *have* ye got in that craft?"

He did not really expect an answer—a coherent one at least. His question was nothing but a taunt, to be understood as such—the contempt of the successful and shrewd for the unstable and flighty.

But Billy MacNair was hardly prepared for what actually happened. Red Pete snarled at one of the blacks. The man sprang up and ran aft with surprising alacrity. He fumbled round a bit and then handed something up to McCandlish—a shotgun; the sun flashed from its polished barrel.

Red Pete tossed the butt to his shoulder and took aim, and MacNair had barely time to whirl and present his back when the report rang out.

Now a shotgun, even a twelve-gauge, is not so very effective at one hundred feet, and MacNair fortunately was wearing trousers and jacket of stiff English duck. Nevertheless he went straight up in the air a good three feet and when he came down again raced in a complete circle round the top of the house before he sprang down to the deck and shot through the companion hatch and into the cabin. All of which was accompanied by bloodcurdling yells of mingled rage and pain.

Tom Reid, the mate, quickly shut and locked the doors to the companionway and ordered the man at the wheel to put down his helm. Then because he could not speak for laughing, he signaled a farewell to Red

McCandlish with his arm and proceeded to put miles between that hair-trigger seaman and the good ship *Eastern Queen*. When the skipper tried to get back on deck with his Winchester rifle he found progress barred and it was only after he promised not to return and wreak vengeance that the mate permitted him to resume the proper offices of master. The rest of the morning they spent as patient and surgeon respectively, employed in the extraction of small lead pellets from sundry tender portions of Captain MacNair's broad back.

"I'll admit it looks fishy," said Mister Tom Reid, "but what else could he have been divin' for except sponge?"

Captain Billy transfixed him with his stare. "Treasure," he almost whispered. "Spanish plate!"

The mate made a gesture of disbelief.

"Just think it over," the skipper urged. "What would a man be doin' banging down through the islands with a scow full of sponges? That ain't the nature of the trade He'd tow into the nearest harbor and spread them out to dry. But treasure, now, that's another thing."

In spite of himself Mr. Reid was somewhat impressed. He had cruised the Indies enough to know the thing was not impossible. At Sanchez lived a planter who had found the stern of an old Spanish ship among the keys off his own estate; more than one obscure fortune was traced to treasure-trove. Indeed almost any man of wealth among the islands could show you, if he felt inclined, an ancient coin or two which had returned by magic from the sea.

"Pete McCandlish is just the hand to stumble on such a thing." The skipper seemed to read the thought that was passing through his mind. "Furthermore, mind ye, there's no other explanation will fit the facts."

"I cannot see that any one does yet," said the mate bluntly.

Captain Billy looked at him in a kind of pity. "You never were a quick un, Tom," he said. "Listen, now; I'll make it clear to you as day. We're not concerned with how Red Pete found the wreck; that's neither here nor there. Say that he has and means to salve the loot, what does he do? Pete has a little pay saved up and he wants to handle this proposition on his own—no partners for him! All right. He hires a few black boys, buys a divin' suit and the cheapest kind of hulk that will do the job. A little fishin' craft, you see, would not carry the weight.

"He's a sailor, is Pete—we grant him that. He rigs this junk and somehow works her out to the reefs and moors her over the wreck. 'Tis a slow job and a killin' one, but he does it, bringin' up the bullion a chunk at a time. It pays him for his work!"

MacNair paused tantalizingly to relight his cigar. "What comes next? Why, of course he wants to get it home—to the States at least, for he don't figure to split up with governors or inspectors or the Spanish crown."

Tom Reid gave a grunt of interest, for he began now to see where the other was driving.

"What could be better for his purpose," challenged the skipper, "than this old scow? There's a fair wind the whole way. He can sail her at night into any bayou on the Gulf coast, run her aground in some hidden inlet, sink her and let the sand and mangrove fill her up. Whoever will see her, or if they do who would ever believe she carried the treasure of a plate ship homeward bound to Granada from New Spain?"

Thanks to the certainty of his conviction MacNair had painted better than he knew. Reid's eyes meanwhile opened wide and a flush not born of wind or sun mounted his cheeks.

Still he was not convinced. "And how will Pete cash the stuff in?" he objected.

Billy MacNair bit savagely into his cigar. "Why, you dummy," he cried, "how would *you* do it—with a motor truck and a brass band?"

To this sally, however, Tom Reid made no immediate reply. He was checking over the various items in the skipper's account. They seemed all to ring true, and there was one other which had not been mentioned, a very significant one too—Red Pete's hostility to any interference.

"Well——" said Reid at last, and then he made a question of it: "Well?"

MacNair's face hardened, his small eyes glittered. "No man can shoot *me* in the back and not pay for it!" he pronounced.

It was two days later, in the evening, that the smart schooner *Eastern Queen* turned the corner of Bimini and headed south for the coast of Cuba. She caught a favoring

current close under the lee of the keys and as the wind was fair and the water smooth she made good progress during the night. The following day advanced her in due proportion and nightfall saw her entering the Old Bahama channel at its western end. Billy MacNair had followed precisely the strategy of a terrier who chases a woodchuck into one end of a hollow log and then runs around to nab him as he comes out the other.

The faces of all on board showed an anticipation of pleasurable excitement, though MacNair's expression was perhaps a trifle grim. He was a good navigator and he had estimated the speed of the strange treasure ship to a decimal.

About midnight the moon rose, in its last quarter but still bright enough to light the smooth tropical sea for miles around. The skipper called all hands and doubled the lookouts. He and the mate took short spells on watch between them, for when a man looks too long and steadily his eyesight dims.

Slowly the *Eastern Queen* drifted cross channel toward the fringe of keys and reefs that line the Cuban coast.

"Reckon we've stood over far enough," growled Captain MacNair at last. "He'll be hittin' it down the middle in that old scow."

"If he can," the mate amended.

"Oh, even a cracker box can sail down the wind."

But Mr. Reid remained staring fixedly ahead. Something—a faint flash of light, it looked like—had caught his keen eye.

"The wind's been in the northeast all night. 'Tis on this side, I expect, we'll find him."

MacNair grunted an inaudible comment but he did not change the vessel's course.

A deep stillness had descended upon the schooner. Her running lights extinguished, she floated like a spectral wraith across the burnished moonlight on the sea. A gentle breeze hummed through her rigging and lifted the leech of her jib with an occasional flap. Beyond that and a soft gurgle of water at her bow there was no sound.

The moon climbed higher and the steep Cuban shore loomed clearer through its silver mist. From some native village came ever so faintly the crowing of a cock.

"Four bells," the skipper muttered. "He ought to be along!"

"There's something movin' past the reefs!"

"Where?" cried MacNair.

He pointed his glasses as the mate directed and presently gave his low, breathy whistle. "It's him," he announced; "in almost on top o' the keys!"

Here was an enigma, one that Captain MacNair for all his cunning had not foreseen; dared he risk his vessel in order to seize his prey?

Then a curious thing took place. On the stranger a light appeared. It danced, it waved, it flourished, it did all but talk. To the men on the schooner its meaning was clear enough—a cry for help. The scow, at best a wretched thing to handle, was drifting down toward the reefs, helpless to deny the gentle but remorseless insistence of the quartering breeze.

MacNair thought quickly. If he let her go aground his own vessel, being deeper, could not get to her. True, he might wait till the scow grounded and then pillage her with his boats, but that would take time and might attract attention. Also, he reckoned shrewdly that Red Pete, seeing merely a schooner's outline hazy in the offing, would not run the risk of luring her to destruction. There must still be room——

"He figures there's time yet to drag him out a piece," said MacNair aloud. "Well—I'll chance it. Here, mister"—this to the mate—"get that towing hawser on deck and have it ready—and a heaving line too. Look sharp!" and he grinned as he pictured the victim's amazement.

When presently the schooner came within range Red Pete was ready. Standing in the bow of his queer ship he caught the heaving line with his own arms and rattled blasphemous Spanish at the negroes who hauled it in hand over hand as fast as their arms could go. To the end of the line the hawser had been made fast. Pete and the blacks seized it and together they secured it to the forward bitts of the scow. Then MacNair, grinning under his bushy mustache, ordered the schooner's helm put down and started to drag his prey out into deeper and safer water. Pete had not recognized his rescuer—that was clear.

The hawser was a long one and as the mate let nearly the whole length of it run out before taking up the full heft of the tow it was a minute perhaps before the schooner felt its drag. During this time she

was gathering speed. Her sails were trimmed to take best advantage of the soft night breeze and she moved smoothly and easily through the water. But as the tow-line tautened and finally sprang clear of the sea, stretching stiff as an iron rod into the darkness astern, its pull seemed to rob her of all power. She checked, gradually at first, then with increasing velocity, ending with a yank that made MacNair take two quick steps forward to preserve his balance.

"Land of Goshen!" he exclaimed. "That thing stops her like we'd made fast to a dock!"

Tom Reid muttered and glanced uneasily at the line of reefs that lay all along under their lee. "Sure, you couldn't expect it to follow like a skiff," he growled under his breath.

MacNair stepped to the rail and peered over at the black water. A bit of Gulf weed floating in it barely moved along the *Eastern Queen's* smooth side. He looked astern where the square outline of the outlandish tow loomed vaguely through the low mist, then abeam at the warning flash of breakers scarcely a cable length away.

"Get the lead going!" he barked. "Sing out quick if the water shows any sign of shoaling!"

"Cap'n, there's a lump o' reef just awash, broad on the lee bow!" came a startled call from the lookout.

"Jehoshaphat!" roared Billy MacNair. Then he whirled on the mate: "Mister, cast off that towing hawser: *let her go!*"

But Tom Reid, standing grimly between him and the quarter bitts to which the hawser was made fast, gave a low laugh. "Nothin' doing, Mac, old son," said he. "You started this racket; now by gum you're going to see it through!"

MacNair gasped. A flush of rage swept over him, to be succeeded next moment by a cold feeling about the heart. He knew his mate; only killing would budge him when he spoke like that. A hand crept to his coat pocket, closed on the butt of his pistol. "There would be one less to divide with," a voice within him said. But no, the thing was impossible, grotesque—after all, he was not a common felon! And Reid was not a common mutineer—they were in this thing together. He counted on the mate, required his support. MacNair licked his lips and became suddenly aware that his jaw muscles were quivering.

"How's that reef bear now?" he managed to sing out without letting the tremor into his voice.

"'Bout the same," came the reply. "Seems to be gettin' handier, though."

A cold sweat burst from Billy MacNair's forehead. God, what folly! And however could he square himself with the owners—casting their vessel away in the Bahama channel when he had no business ever to have been within three hundred miles of the place!

"Tom—see here, Tom——"

"Buck up, man," growled the mate. "You were doin' fine so long as it was only a case of murder. Is the *Eastern Queen* more to you then than the lives of five men?"

"We mightn't need to kill 'em. But she is, I reckon, at that."

"Reef seems to be drawin' abeam," a nonchalant voice cut in.

"Eh?—abeam? How much water now?" snapped Captain MacNair.

The leadsman made a fresh cast. "Deepening again, sir," he replied. "Quarter less *six.*"

MacNair heaved a deep sigh and mopped his forehead. "She's clear, I reckon," he breathed. Then with a touch of his usual briskness, "Get ready, mister," he said, "to haul that cursed scow up alongside."

The pale glow which precedes dawn was just beginning to light the sky when the *Eastern Queen* hove to at a safe distance from the shore and the rattle of her gasoline winch shattered the serenity of that hushed moment which ushers in the day. It was like the squawk of a twopenny whistle breaking across the first trembling chords of some mighty organ.

Red Pete, half dreaming beside the wheel of his own queer craft, came back to the world of men with a start. His Gaelic mind, sensitive as a child's to beauty, was none the less nimble to interpret the actualities of life.

"Tumble out, fellers; tumble out!" he exhorted. And to the mestizo who had been dozing on the deck by his feet he added:

"She's hauling us up alongside—so's to give us a chance to make sail, I suppose. That fellow is white, he's square! I never thought any man would take the risk he's done to save another vessel—least of all a queer old crate like this! But it's good for us, eh, Zepharino?"

"It is God's providence, señor," said the other simply.

The Gael's pale eyes took on a strange gleam. "Aye—aye—there may be more in what you say——" He stopped abruptly and frowned. The dawn always affected him like this—gave him a strange, happy feeling of extended consciousness, of remoteness from everyday affairs, a sort of smiling compassion for the sins and shortcomings of men, his own included. But experience warned him it would be wiser to control these impulses until he had learned just what the unknown rescuer wanted.

The winch rattled on and the two vessels slowly drew together. Day brightened swiftly. Long roseate streamers leaped up out of the east—the "rosy-fingered dawn" of the ancients, heralding the chariot of the sun.

His eyes aglow, Red Pete looked up at the broad stern of the schooner before him on which now became visible a name painted in bold block letters. And as he read that name a wonder came over him that thrilled his body with an actual shiver and spread a mist momentarily before his eyes. For he knew well enough that Captain MacNair could never have mistaken *him*.

To the latter, leaning grim-eyed over his rail, it was evident that McCandlish labored under a deep emotion. But he was all unprepared for his words. They came in a rich, rapid torrent, half of which would have been unintelligible to any man who had not lived in the Highlands or among the exiled Scots of Cape Breton Island. MacNair was himself partly of that breed, enough at least to comprehend dully that this man, his victim, was thanking him deeply, sincerely, utterly without suspicion of ulterior motive. MacNair had done him good for evil, he had run a great risk—oh, he need not deny it!—merely to save for one who had ill used him his old trap of a craft. But he had done more than that actually—how much more would soon be made clear.

" 'Tis me very treasure ye saved!" cried Pete; then he stopped short, for MacNair, unable longer to support the strain, had sprung down upon the deck of the scow.

"Haul back that tarpaulin," he ordered the blacks in a savage yet a shaking voice.

"The very thing!" cried McCandlish in delight. "Ye shall see it with your own eyes. Man, how I slaved for it—hours on end till the heart in me broke, toiling and striving with body and mind and speerit! Then I could get no vessel, so I rigged up this old trap to take the cargo mysel' to Havana; but last night the wind came round and began to set her down upon the reefs."

In the depths of his being MacNair heard strange voices singing. He was conscious of a tremendous conflict which seemed to buffet him like the shocks of recurrent explosions, but he held himself in check.

"Cut the lashings—rip that cover off—let's see the stuff!" he snarled. The mestizo, who had been watching with a curious stare, dropped catlike into the hold and inserted new shells in his master's shotgun. This action did not escape Red Pete. His expression changed so abruptly that it seemed as though comprehension had struck him almost like a physical blow. An instant he hesitated, looking from MacNair to the negroes struggling with the tarpaulin and back to MacNair. Then his voice boomed out. It was an amazing voice, coming from so insignificant a body.

"Leave off, there!" he roared. "Cut the towline; strike her adrift. Let go your buntlines—sheet home the foresail!"

"Now *you*——" he concluded, wheeling toward MacNair; and the next instant he had crossed the space between them at a bound and landed a smashing blow on the angle of Captain MacNair's square jaw.

It was as though an April shower had delivered a thunderbolt. Along the schooner's rail men blinked and glanced at one another for confirmation of what their eyes had seen. Tom Reid swore and yelled for some one to go to the Old Man's aid, but too late, for already the awkward scow was drawing away from the schooner's side with her foresail thrashing and bellying to the wind. Straight away at right angles she went, with Billy MacNair lying on his back on the middle of the tarpaulin and Red Pete standing over him waiting for him to get up.

" 'Strewth," gasped Reid. "My soul, he's a quick un! Haul the headsails to weather, boys—pay her off! Get way on her or we'll never catch him before he fetches the reefs!"

But while this maneuver took time very little was required by Pete McCandlish for the work he had in hand. Knocking the shotgun out of the mestizo's hands he sprang at Billy MacNair with the agility of a small and very active spider. Blows rained upon that devoted mariner's face until he turned and fled blindly to the stern. Here, to his

everlasting ignominy, he would have leaped overboard if Red Pete had not tackled him and brought him down to the deck.

With something tangible to grapple and seize hold of Captain Billy's dazed senses rallied and with the rally came a wave of white-hot rage. He crushed Red Pete's small body in his powerful hug and gave a grunt of savage joy when he felt the breath expelled from his lungs. Then he clambered to his feet—and found himself looking into the muzzle of a leveled shotgun.

MacNair hesitated. He was no coward but the mestizo had a determined look and there could be no question as to who was in the right. The four negroes, moreover, were trooping aft, having finished sheeting home the big square foresail. Astern, his own vessel still lay in the wind, powerless for the moment to render any aid—and the distance between them fast increasing.

Captain Billy took a step backward. The mestizo pressed the gun butt more firmly into his shoulder and his trigger finger tensed.

"Hold hard!" gasped Red Pete, struggling to catch his breath, "I've ne'er done murder yet." He raised himself on an elbow and pointed a crooked forefinger at Captain Billy's face.

"Ye licked me fair and I figure that squares us on the shooting. What more do ye want?"

"Your—treasure," said the other without taking his eyes from the gun muzzle. Instead of the laugh he expected, however, there followed a silence and glancing sidewise at Red Pete he saw the latter, to his great surprise, lost in deep thought.

"Skipper MacNair, I mind ye saved my vessel," said Red Pete at last; "and I'll no deny ye're entitled to a third of ship and cargo for the salvage."

Captain Billy gasped.

"You mean you'll give me a third of your cargo, after all?"

"'Tis the law—and what is law is right. I'll give it to ye now, to put aboard your schooner, and my note for a third the value of this old scow. That will settle the matter 'twixt us and keep it out of court."

For once Billy MacNair had no words to voice his thought. To be sure it was not the rich loot he had hoped for, but even a third must be a king's ransom—the scow laden as she was! And to come by it honestly, without fear and without reproach! Come, the Lady of Luck was with him after all.

He bent forward eagerly and moistened his lips. "Let's see the stuff!"

Red Pete nodded. "Aye," he said, then gave some orders in patois to the negro crew.

The negroes slouched aft and seized the free corners of the tarpaulin. At a word from Red Pete they dragged the cover off. The scow's cargo lay revealed.

A long minute Billy MacNair stood like a statue, saying no word. Beside him McCandlish was babbling like a pleased schoolgirl. "Is it no handsome, MacNair? My first crop—not enough to bring a vessel in for; but next year there will be more. Mind the long fiber, now! Man, there's no finer cotton grown on this broad airth. I'm a planter, MacNair, with acres to me name."

With a roar Captain Billy threw up his hands and turned his back on the collection of ill-shaped bales. "Keep it," he bellowed; "keep it all!"

When the schooner *Eastern Queen* finally overtook the scow and ran up alongside he was still trembling with rage and mortification, but he sprang over her rail with such a savage face that even Tom Reid made shift to smother his grin.

"Well, good-by to ye; and mind, I've offered fair salvage," shouted Red Pete after the *Eastern Queen's* stern; but there was no answer.

An hour later only her topsails were visible above the blue horizon in the northwest. The scow, under full sail, followed the curving Cuban coast westward in the direction of Havana. Beside her wheel stood McCandlish in his dirty linen clothes but with a cigar cocked up at a truculent angle from his mouth.

"'Tis queer MacNair never asked about the diving suit," he observed.

The mestizo laughed softly. "He did not see it this time, and besides, he is a fool—only fools get angry when they are beat."

Red Pete chuckled.

"True enough," he said. "I wonder now would Mac have had the sense to probe those bales if he'd got them aboard once and felt their heft?"

*Don't miss the first installment of "The Storm Center," a serial of adventure by Burton Stevenson in the next number.*

# The Missing Millions

By Edgar Wallace

*Author of "The Valley of Ghosts," "The Day of Uniting," Etc.*

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Who was "Kupie" that Rex Walton should disappear, forsaking family, friends, even his ostensible bride-to-be without a word of farewell at the behest of the mysterious blackmailer? Jimmy Sepping of Scotland Yard, Walton's detective friend, could not guess. He knew of nothing in the past of the vanished millionaire to warrant his flight at the suggestion of blackmail. Neither did Joan, Walton's sister, nor Dora Coleman, his abandoned bride. Why had Rex changed his English fortune into American millions just before his disappearance? And what had become of those millions? Who were the prowlers about the Walton house? Why were they there? Why had the Walton telephone line been tampered with, and where were the wire tappers? What were the burned papers discovered by Jimmy in Walton's desk? What of the singular burglar who entered the Coleman home shortly after Rex's disappearance, took nothing, and left behind a pistol engraved with the word "Kupie?" What of the impeccable Parker, the Coleman butler, whose caligraphy corresponded so strikingly with that of Kupie? Then there was Rex Walton's fleeting reappearance under Sepping's windows—and the abortive attempt of a gunman known as "The Digger" to shoot Jimmy down in the street. Following these incidents, burglars ransacked the offices of Lawford Collett, the Coleman lawyer, and stole the antenuptial contract between Rex and Dora. It developed then that Walton had married a mysterious May Liddiart on the day prior to his disappearance. But this incident Dora Coleman herself was able to explain. She confessed to identity with the May Liddiart registered as Rex's wife and explained that she and her vanished husband had wished to steal a secret march on Kupie, who threatened dire things if the marriage took place. Sepping congratulated himself that at least one complication was eliminated. But another immediately supervened. This time his own apartment was entered. A packet of letters confided to Jimmy's care by his whimsical, burglarious friend, "Nippy" Knowles, was stolen. The letters were love missives from Knowles' one-time flame, a certain Julia. Nippy suggested the explanation for this latest outrage. If Julia's letters were of value to Kupie it could only mean that Julia was involved in the affair. But Sepping had little time to consider this angle. The alarm was out for Lawford Collett. He had disappeared, too. And then came the final startling discovery of the butler, Parker, murdered in the Coleman home.

*(A Five-Part Story—Part IV.)*

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WALTON!

"TELEPHONE to police headquarters and tell them to send a couple of men as quickly as they can. You can also telephone to the Middlesex Hospital for an ambulance—no, I don't think you need do that," he said after a moment's thought. "Get the police."

He turned the body over on to its back. The waistcoat was wet with blood and a brief examination told him that the man had been shot at close quarters, for the coat was singed. Switching on the light of the bedside lamp he put it down by the side of the body and continued his examination. On the man's left hand was an old wrist watch. The glass was broken, and the wrist was bruised, as though it had been struck

by some blunt weapon. The watch had stopped at twenty minutes to eight.

Death must have been instantaneous, he thought, and very little blood could have been shed. It was possible, therefore, that the body might have been carried into the room after it was dead and hidden in the cupboard. It was equally likely that he was shot in the position he was found.

He made a search of the cupboard and the latter hypothesis became a certainty, for the bullet had passed through the body and was embedded in the wooden lining of the wardrobe. Then began a very careful search of the dead man's pockets. A few treasury notes, one or two pieces of silver, and an old watch, which was still going, rewarded his search. Why did Parker carry two watches? he wondered—though that was an eccentricity not peculiar to Parker.

Passing his hand over the coat he felt something hard and square and from the inside pocket he took out a red-morocco case which he instantly recognized before he pressed the spring and the top flew back, to show the fatal jewel which Rex Walton had left behind on the day of his flight.

Jimmy put the pendant down upon the bed and continued his search. And then he made another discovery. It was a folded sheet of paper inclosed in an open envelope. The paper was covered with writing in pencil, which he easily identified. It was the same writing that had come on all the Kupie letters and was undoubtedly Parker's.

It began "Dear Tod," and it was obvious that the dead man had been interrupted in his writing, because it stopped about three inches from the bottom of the page and in the middle of a sentence. After a brief scrutiny he placed envelope and paper in his pocketbook. By this time Mr. Coleman had returned.

"They are coming immediately," he said, and for once Jimmy admired the man's calmness in face of tragedy.

"Dora must be told," he said. "She talked of coming back to-morrow morning."

"Why not leave it till the morning?" said Jimmy, but Mr. Coleman shook his head.

"Dora is a very early riser, and besides, I don't want her to learn of this through the newspapers. He is dead?"

Jimmy nodded.

"What was he doing there, do you think?" asked Mr. Coleman, and then his eyes fell upon the trinket and he uttered an exclamation. "Did you find this on him?" he said.

"It was in his pocket," said Jimmy. "It is Dora's pendant, isn't it?"

Mr. Coleman took up the case with its glittering contents and nodded.

"Yes, this is the pendant. And it was Parker——"

"It was either Parker or the man who killed Parker," said Jimmy. "I don't know—it is extraordinary."

Bill Dicker arrived at the same time as the divisional surgeon. The doctor did not trouble to do more than look at the silent figure.

"Oh, yes, he's dead. Shot, isn't he?" he asked.

"Was he found there, Jimmy?" asked Dicker, bending over the man.

Jimmy pointed to the cupboard.

"He was inside; when I opened the door he fell out. How long has he been dead?"

"Two or three hours, so far as I can tell," said the surgeon. "You will want him moved, I suppose? I'll arrange that at once." He went downstairs with Mr. Coleman to telephone and the two detectives were left alone.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"I make nothing of it," replied Jimmy Sepping with a helpless gesture. "The man was shot at close range, probably at about twenty minutes to eight this evening." He pointed to the marks on the man's arm and the smashed wrist watch. "I should imagine he put up a struggle and was first bludgeoned and afterward shot."

He gave a brief explanation of the discovery and Bill Dicker began to wander around the room, his keen eyes taking in every little detail.

"No smell of cordite," he said. "That would be understandable if the windows were open, but they're closed. Therefore we may suppose that after this man was shot the windows and doors were opened to get rid of the powder smell, and shut again. Curtains drawn—you say Miss Coleman was not sleeping here to-night? Why are the curtains drawn?"

"The same thought occurred to me," said Jimmy.

"The safe is open. What does that mean?"

Jimmy told him of Dora Coleman's pendant and its recovery.

"It was lost yesterday," said Dicker

thoughtfully, "and recovered in the pocket of a man who was murdered in this room to-night. It is hardly likely that Parker or Felman would have carried this valuable property about with him for a day and less likely that, if he had stolen it yesterday, he would have brought it back to-night. Therefore we must presume that Parker, unknown to Mr. Coleman, was hiding in this house all the time. I think it would pay us to have a look round."

They searched the house from top to bottom. Parker's room had been taken over by Bennett; it was therefore unlikely that it was here that a man had hidden, if Dicker's theory was correct. The wine cellars adjoined the basement kitchen, as also did the coal cellar. A very thorough inspection of these places brought them no nearer to the mystery of Parker's presence in the house.

It was on the basement level and in a larder, which Mr. Coleman explained was no longer used, that Jim found a mystery room. The entrance was concealed by a packing case which stood on top of a square stone trapdoor, into which an iron ring had been let at some distant period.

"This looks as if it had been recently used," said Dicker.

He tugged at the ring and the trap came up easily enough. Beneath was a black void, but his hand torch showed him a wooden ladder leading down no great distance, and he descended, followed by Jimmy. They were in a small square apartment which had neither door nor outlet of any kind. Around the wall were a number of iron shelves. It was obviously the wine cellar of a previous occupant of the house, and was not altogether empty, for there were two large boxes branded with the name of an Oporto wine merchant.

"There's a windfall for you, Mr. Coleman," said Dicker with a half smile. "Unless the branding is wrong you've got a couple of dozen bottles of 'fifty-eight port."

"I never knew this place existed," said Mr. Coleman, "and certainly I have not used it. Of course I would not dream of drinking anybody else's wine. It must be returned to its rightful owner."

Jimmy sounded the walls, but they were solid, and they climbed up the ladder again satisfied that there was no way out from this unsuspected crypt.

"The place is entirely without ventilators and he could not have slept there without being asphyxiated," said Dicker.

Every room and even the roof was completely inspected without bringing them any nearer to Parker's hiding place. They were leaving the house when Jimmy remembered that he had promised to telephone to Dora; and after some delay he got through to Marlow and the sleepy voice of a woman servant answered him. Eventually Dora was aroused, and, as simply as he could, he broke the news of the tragic happening in her bedroom. He heard her gasp.

"I will come up," she said.

"That is the very thing you mustn't do," said Jimmy.

"But I must come up, I must!" she said. "Murdered in my room! How terrible!"

Suddenly and very sharply she stopped and cut off the connection.

The police were now in possession of the house and Mr. Coleman had gone across to the neighboring hotel. Apparently the nature of the tragedy which had been enacted in his house was so tremendous that even the thought of the undesirable light that would be thrown upon his private life did not add to his distress.

Back at the Yard Jimmy produced the letter he had found in the dead man's pocket. It was written in pencil, and had no address. He read:

DEAR TOD: There is a lot in this business that I don't understand. And I am pretty nearly through with it. The money you gave me to get abroad isn't nearly enough. I'm going to try to see you at the old place to-night, but if I don't I am going to leave this letter. The Kupie business is bust and I don't think you'll get the mug. I ought to get something extra for the letters. We had to cosh a man to get them, and it was very risky, because the busy came in soon after we left. If he'd been a few minutes earlier it would have been good night, aunt. I will make another——

There the letter ended.

"Another attempt to see you," finished Dicker. "And if I don't see you then, I'll post this letter."

"He saw him all right," said Jimmy grimly.

"What do you make of it?" demanded Dicker.

"The readiest explanation that comes to my mind," answered Jimmy, studying the letter again, "is that Parker met Tod, and Tod persuaded him to go after the diamond pendant. Obviously Parker was only a tool —I suspected that long ago."

'You suggest, then, that they got into Coleman's house together and that some sort of quarrel arose, during which this man was killed?"

Jimmy nodded slowly.

"That is too simple an explanation, but it is a fact that Parker wanted money and it is quite possible that Tod might have told him where there was easy money to be had."

"Parker knew that. Besides, the burglary occurred the day before," said the puzzled Jimmy.

"Tod may have done it," insisted Dicker. "It was the lure of the pendant—or possibly the pendant was the price he paid for the second attempt on the safe."

"Who is 'the mug' referred to?" asked Dicker, breaking a long silence.

"Me, perhaps," said Jimmy bitterly. "And it *was* Julia's letters they were after! Albert was the man they 'coshed' and I was the 'busy' who came in just too late."

They sat together, hands in pockets, gloomily surveying the letter and the pendant that glittered in the light of the overhead branch lamp; then Jimmy roused himself with a sigh.

"There is one man I'd like to interview just now, and that is the eminent Mr. Knowles, who, in addition to being an expert burglar, has, I am certain, a mass of information about Tod Haydn. Anyway, we have enough evidence to pull in Tod, and without any further delay I think we ought to comb out Carsholt Street, Tidal Basin."

It was daylight before his arrangements were made. His first call was at Mr. Knowles' house at South Lambeth. Here he received some startling and unexpected news from the landlady who came, half dressed, to the door.

"No, sir," she said, recognizing Jim, "Mr. Knowles hasn't been home all night. It's rather worrying me, because he's a very regular man, and I've never known him to be out later than ten since he's been staying with me."

"Did you see the man who called for him last night?" asked Jimmy.

"I didn't see him, sir. He was a gentleman; I could tell that by his voice; and I know his name, too."

"You know his name?" said Jimmy eagerly. "What was it?"

But the good lady had her story to tell her own way.

"Mr. Knowles had come in for five minutes, and was just going out, when this gentleman knocked. I was standing at the head of the stairs, and I heard him say: 'What can I do for you, sir?' and then the gentleman said: 'You know me, Knowles,' and Mr. Knowles seemed sort of taken back, and said: 'Why, Mr. Walton!'"

"Walton!" gasped Jimmy. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely, sir. I could take my oath on the Bible in a court of law," said the landlady emphatically.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### AT TIDAL BASIN.

Into the complicated situation had come yet another complication. What had Rex Walton to do with the little burglar? He remembered now that Knowles had once told him that he had met Rex and that Rex had been kind to him. But what possible service could Nippy render to this master of millions?

He drove, via the Blackwall Tunnel, to Tidal Basin, and there he found the search party waiting for him. Carsholt Street, unlike its slummy neighbors, was a thoroughfare of houses which are favored by the decent artisan class, and at this hour of the morning was deserted, every window blind being drawn. They had not been assembled long before one of the doors opened and a man came out, walking toward where Jimmy was standing. He was an early-morning workman and he shot a suspicious glance at Jimmy as the detective advanced to meet him.

"No, sir, I don't know anybody named Haydn," he said when the reason for the holdup was explained. "There are dozens of young couples living in this street. What's the girl like?"

"She is supposed to be very pretty," said Jimmy cautiously, for he was not prepared to accept Knowles' prejudiced view of Julia's beauty.

"There's only one pretty girl who lives in this street, and I've never seen her," said the workman. "She lives at No. 44; she and her husband has the upstairs room. I only know that because a mate of mine told me he'd seen her and her husband once. They don't live down here, as far as I can make out. They've got a room and they come now and again. He's supposed to be

a sailor and she lives with her mother when he's at sea. I don't know what he looks like any more than I could recognize her."

His informant was allowed to pass on, and presently another, this time a middle-aged woman, put in an appearance and was stopped by one of the detectives and brought to Jimmy.

"It must be the people at No. 44," she said. "There's nobody else that you could properly call pretty. He's a seafaring man." Practically she repeated what they had already been told.

"They're at No. 44," said Jimmy, and crossing the street he walked up till he came abreast of the house.

Both upstairs and downstairs the blinds were drawn. He knocked and there was an immediate answer. A succession of thumps in an uncarpeted passage came to his ears and presently the door was opened and the white face of a boy stared at him from the darkness of the passage. He was a cripple and was apparently the sole occupant of the downstairs rooms. His mother, he frankly confessed, was "doing twenty-one days for drunk."

"Who lives upstairs?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Marsh," said the boy, "but they're not at home. They very seldom stay here—in fact, I don't remember that they ever did."

Going upstairs, Jimmy found that there were only two rooms, and these he opened, despite the protests of the cripple. The back room was bare and empty. It contained not so much as a chair. The front room, however, was unusually well furnished for a house of this class. A comfortable couch, which, Jimmy found, could be converted into a bed; a deep armchair; a tall secretaire and a big table, were the principal contents of the room. The writing portion of the secretaire was empty.

"Not even a pen," said Jimmy. "Let us have a look at his books."

Tod Haydn's library—if this room belonged to the notorious Tod—consisted of a number of novels, a current "Who's Who," ten volumes of an encyclopedia, and a number of other books, mainly directories. There was also a map of England, with certain unusual boundaries drawn in in red ink, and these puzzled Jimmy until one of the detectives who was with him supplied the explanation.

"Those are assize areas, sir," he said, pointing. "For instance, any crime committed inside that line would be tried at the Oxford Assizes; any crime committed on the other side would be tried at Gloucester; and beyond that, at Hereford."

Support came for this view when they found a Law Almanac with the dates of the assizes underlined.

"It looks rather as if our friend expected an appearance at court," said Jimmy.

"More likely that he had an idea of dodging trial," said the detective who had supplied the first solution. "In some of these places you may be held on bail or on remand for months until you're brought up before a judge. I should think he has worked out a scheme to get the longest remand possible in order to make his getaway. He has probably got bail already fixed. I know Tod Haydn's methods and there isn't a better workman at the game. At least there is nobody who can cover his tracks better than Todd."

"Have you seen him?"

The police officer shook his head.

"No, I can't say I've seen him, sir," he replied.

Jimmy opened all the drawers in the hope of finding some article of woman's wear, but here he was disappointed. Usually, even the most careful of criminals leaves some minute trace of his presence; but there was not so much as a hairpin to betray the visit of Julia.

He interviewed the crippled boy and learned that the couple had only been in the house for an hour, and they'd spent that time looking at maps.

"What kind of maps?"

"I don't know what kind, sir, but I took 'em up a cup of tea, and they were looking at the map together, and the gentleman had a pencil in his hand and was writing on a piece of paper."

When he was asked to describe the girl, he was vague—Jimmy believed purposely so. He found afterward that the mother and the son lived rent free on the floor below, in return for such small services as the real landlord required. Mr. and Mrs. Marsh—this was the name by which they were known—did not usually live in the neighborhood. The boy told the story Jimmy had already heard twice about Tod being a seaman, and the only additional information he gave was that Mrs. Marsh lived with her mother in the country. He

was even more vague when they tried to pin him down to details.

Jim was leaving the house when a thought occurred to him and he turned round to the boy.

"Where do you send the letters?" he asked.

He saw, by the flush that came to the cripple's face and the look of intense annoyance that showed momentarily in his eyes, that he had asked the very question that the boy did not want to answer.

"He doesn't have many letters." The cripple hesitated. "And when he does we keep them for him."

"Where do you send them?" insisted Jim.

"I don't exactly remember the name, sir," pleaded the boy. "I haven't had a good memory since my accident. Mother knows better than I do."

With a home-office order Jimmy interviewed the absent landlady in the visitors' room at Holloway Prison. She was a stout and voluble woman with a grievance against the police.

"It's no use your staying here, because I'm not going to copper anybody," said the woman truculently. "My lodgers are respectable people; they keep themselves to themselves and I keep myself to myself. And anyway, I'm not going to do anything for busies who'd swear your life away for a glass of beer. I was no more drunk——"

"Don't let us have an argument," pleaded Jimmy. "I'll see what I can do for you to get your sentence reduced if you'll be a good soul and answer my questions."

"I don't want my sentence reduced; I'm coming out the day after to-morrow!" said the good lady triumphantly. "And even if I was serving a hundred years I wouldn't tell you anything."

"You won't serve a hundred but you may serve seven," said Jimmy, altering his tone. "I want your lodger for murder and I needn't tell a sensible woman twice that if she helps a murderer to escape justice she is liable to penal servitude."

The attitude of the woman changed. From being defiant and glorying in her conviction she began to wail and whine about the hard lot which was hers.

"If I never move from this spot, Mr. What's-your-name, I know no more about the Marshes than you do. They've been very good to me. I never pay any rent; they've given me my house rent free, and there's always a pound or two to be had for the asking."

"Where do you send their letters?"

She gave an address which, Jimmy knew, was an accommodation house of call in the West End. That told him nothing.

"When you send the letters to the country where do they go?"

"I never do send the letters to the country," she said, and Jimmy believed her.

"Who's been murdered, mister?" she asked, her curiosity getting the better of her.

Ordinarily, Jimmy would not have satisfied her, but on this occasion he was reaching out for clews and he could not afford even to be reticent.

"A man named Parker or Felman," he said, and was unprepared for the effect his words had on the prisoner.

Her jaw dropped, her face went white and she half rose.

"Felman!" she said hollowly. "My God! Who killed him?"

"I don't know, but I want to see Mr. Marsh in relation to this crime," said Jimmy. "Do you know Felman?"

She nodded, her lips quivering.

"Oh, my God!" she said again.

"Where did you meet him?"

And then to his amazement she burst into a torrent of weeping.

"Who was Felman?" he demanded.

"My husband!" she sobbed.

When she grew calmer she told him that she had not been living with the man for years but that he made her a small allowance and that it was through him that she had got into the Marshes' house on such advantageous terms. And there she had seen her husband, because he had frequently called to confer with the Marshes, though he'd never taken very much notice of her.

"Mr. Marsh didn't kill him, that I'll swear," she said energetically. "He was very fond of Felman. Of course, Felman was a bad man and had been in trouble; but the idea of his being murdered is awful!"

"Do you know where your husband was employed?"

"Yes," she nodded, "at Mr. Coleman's, where he was called Parker. He told me he'd got into a very nice house and he was going to make a lot of money. That is the only thing he ever told me about himself. And now to think that he's dead!" She burst into a fresh storm of sobs.

Jimmy left it to the local C. I. D. to watch the house.

"Though I do not expect we shall catch the birds," he said, "for either the boy or the woman will communicate with them—that is certain."

He snatched a few hours' sleep and was again at his desk by noon, interviewing such of the privileged reporters as had the entrée to his office. Whether Dora had come to town or not, he did not know, for his inquiries took him away from the house in Portland Place. He neither saw nor heard from Knowles; the little man seemed to have disappeared as completely and as mysteriously as any of those who had gone before him. His landlady reported that he had not returned to the house and a search of his usual haunts, including his favorite restaurant in Soho, drew a blank.

"I think I'd better come into this case now," said Bill Dicker. "You've got rather a big plateful, Jimmy. Your Digger man, by the way, has been remanded, though I don't really believe you've got sufficient evidence to convict him. Do you think he'll squeal any more?"

"He's squealed all he knows," said Jimmy decisively. "We've come to a cul-de-sac. The real squeaker is dead."

"You mean Parker, of course?" nodded Bill Dicker. "His letter struck me that way. The man was scared and ready to turn State's evidence—if we could only have got him before *they* did!"

So rapid had been the developments, so many were the events which overlay the disappearance of Rex Walton, that Jimmy had almost forgotten his first and last task had been to discover the whereabouts of his friend. Joan reminded him of the fact when he met her for tea that day at the Carlton.

"I'm making a confession to you, Jimmy, that will seem extraordinary," she said. "I'm not worried about Rex."

He nodded.

"I felt somehow like that myself," he said. "Although I know that behind all these shocking crimes lies danger to your brother I am satisfied in my mind that he is better prepared now than ever he has been to meet attack."

She had not heard about the disappearance of Knowles. The newspapers had been filled with the Portland Place murder, and, even if Jimmy had given the information to the press, it was unlikely that the linotype machines would have worked hard over a convicted burglar being unaccountably absent from his home.

"I don't understand it," she said, shaking her head, when he told her. "Rex knew this nice little man. I remember Mr. Knowles telling us. But what did he want him for?"

"Heaven knows," said Jimmy piously, "and I am almost content to leave the solution of the whole darned business to Providence."

Then, to his surprise, she asked:

"Jimmy, can you find me a job?"

"What on earth do you mean?" he demanded, and she laughed softly at the sensation she had created.

"I haven't a great deal of money left; I don't know whether that occurs to you; and I've a big house to keep up—a house which I cannot legally dispose of. And unless Rex returns very soon I shall have to do something." Her pretty brows knitted in a frown. "That is what I can't understand, Jimmy—why Rex leaves me almost penniless. That cannot be right. Rex would not hurt me, I'm sure of that."

"Perhaps he has forgotten that he disposed of your money," suggested Jimmy after a moment's consideration. "He had a large sum of money when he disappeared, didn't he?"

"I thought he had, but the only person who could tell us with certainty is the valet, who has gone also. Doesn't it frighten you sometimes, Jimmy? It is so very inexplicable. First Rex, then Wells, then poor Mr. Collett, and now Knowles. Who will be next, I wonder?"

"What I'm wondering," said Jimmy cheerfully, "is who will be the first to reappear."

That was a question which was answered in a dramatic fashion before he was a few hours older.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE RETURN OF LAWFORD COLLETT.

Dora had returned to town, he learned later in the day, when a note came from her asking him to call at Portland Place. As he fingered the envelope he remembered the last letter he had received from the girl and the extraordinary coincidence which had led Dicker to detect, through a thumb mark on

the envelope, the identity of the dead Parker.

Mr. Coleman was out, Bennett told him as he admitted him to the house.

"This is a terrible business, sir," said the new butler. "Terrible! We seem to have nothing but trouble. I wish I'd been here when that man called this afternoon."

"Which man was that?" asked Jimmy absently.

"Nobody seems to know. Mr. Coleman said he was a stranger to him."

"What happened?"

"Mr. Coleman opened the door himself. In fact, he was just going out. And then, without a word, this person hit him across the face with a stick or a whip he was carrying."

Jimmy's mouth opened in surprise.

"Hit Mr. Coleman? Why?" he asked.

"That is what Mr. Coleman wants to know."

"Did he recognize the man?"

"No, sir, he'd never seen him before in his life."

"But didn't Mr. Coleman chase him, or hand him over to a policeman?"

"No, sir, he was so dazed that the man was gone before he could recover himself. It thoroughly upset him."

"I give it up," said Jimmy with a shrug. "It is such a jig-saw puzzle that I despair of ever—— Miss Coleman is in the drawing-room?"

Dora looked very pale and hollow-eyed. She said she had not slept after he had wakened her, and in spite of the protest of her father she had insisted on coming up to town.

"Of course, we're not staying here to-night," she said. "I couldn't." She shuddered and went a shade paler. "Jimmy, what did you find this morning? Father was telling me to-day about the pendant. Was there anything else? Did you make any kind of discovery at all that would help you to bring the murderer to justice?"

"None," said Jimmy.

They were alone, and suddenly, to Jimmy's embarrassment, she laid both hands on his shoulders and her lovely head on his breast.

"Oh, Jimmy," she sobbed, "I'm so sick of it all, so sick of it all! I wish to God I was dead!"

He comforted her as well as he could.

"My dear girl, you're overwrought," he said. "You want to go away into the country and stay there. There's absolutely no need for you to give any kind of evidence at the inquest. I'm going to advise your father to take you to the Continent for a month or two."

She shook her head.

"I can't go, Jimmy," she said, drying her red eyes with a tiny handkerchief. "Don't look at me. I know I look horrible. I should like to tell you such a lot. You are a good sort." She gripped his arm, her wet eyes fixed wistfully on his face.

"There's father," she said as the soft thud of the door reached their ears.

Mr. Coleman came in a few seconds later and Jimmy stared at him. There was no doubt as to the violence of the assault upon him. Across his face was a livid welt, his nose was swollen, and one eye was blackened.

"Look at poor father," she said, and Mr. Coleman growled something under his breath.

"I'm awfully sorry to see this, Mr. Coleman," said Jimmy in all sincerity, for although he did not like the little man he could not help feeling sorry for him.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing," growled Coleman testily. "Of course I shan't be able to go to the office for a day or two. The doctor says it may be weeks before these bruises disappear."

"Bennett told me what happened. I wish you had caught the brute."

"So do I," said the other impressively. "My dear fellow, of course I wish I'd caught him. I would have killed him, sir! I would have struck him with the first thing that came to my hand, sir. We are staying at the Portland Place Hotel to-night," he said. "I am thinking seriously of selling this house. My expenses for the next month or so will be fearful. What with income tax and supertax I might as well be going into the workhouse. Even my own little private fortune is gradually being eaten up."

"Father," said the girl gently, "I'm sure Jimmy doesn't want to hear our domestic troubles."

Again Jimmy heard the front door close, and wondered who the visitor was.

"If Walton had only——" began Mr. Coleman, when the door opened, and a man walked in, at the sight of whom the silence of utter amazement fell upon him.

It was Lawford Collett!

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### DEAD!

"Where have you come from?" asked Jimmy, finding his voice.

"I should like to be able to tell you," drawled the other, "but I haven't the slightest idea. All I know is, it's three hours away and on a yacht of some kind. I want to see you, Mr. Coleman."

He was looking seriously at the disfigured face of his client.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"I'll tell you later," said Mr. Coleman gruffly. "What is the meaning of this, Collett? Where have you been?"

"I was kidnaped. May I smoke?" He took a thin gold cigarette case from his pocket, opened it and selected a cigarette with such care that it might have been thought that there was more than one variety. He lit the cigarette and sat down, stretching himself luxuriously in the armchair into which he had sunk. "I was kidnaped," he said; "picked up in the streets of London, in spite of our beautifully efficient police force; taken to some seaside place; put on board a yacht and held prisoner there until this afternoon. The ship had a wireless transmission set and fortunately I understood the way to work it. Unfortunately or fortunately the message I was sending out to the world was not allowed to go."

"But who kept you prisoner?" asked Jimmy. "I suppose there was somebody on board the yacht in control?"

"There was indeed," said the other grimly. "But who it was I don't know."

Jimmy was scrutinizing him keenly. The man was lying; of that he was sure.

"Can't you do a little hard thinking and tell me who it was?" he asked quietly.

"Perhaps I will later," said Lawford Collett, blowing out a ring of smoke and watching it float to the ceiling. "At the moment I feel extremely reticent. Nobody knows I am back and I do not want to see those infernal reporters."

"Apart from the infernal reporters," said Jimmy, "may I suggest that you owe the police some explanation? We have taken a lot of trouble about you and you are billed from one end of the country to the other as being among the missing."

"I will make a full statement in due course," said Collett in his prim way. "At present I do not wish or intend to say any more than what I have said."

Under these circumstances, Jimmy wondered why he had taken the trouble to make his appearance at Portland Place, unless it was that Mr. Coleman was the only known intimate he had. All thought or opportunity for a private talk with Dora was now out of the question and, soon after, Jimmy went, leaving Lawford Collett mystifying Mr. Coleman with the tantalizing half truth of his adventure.

Whatever wishes Collett may have had in regard to keeping his arrival secret there were certain official formalities which had to be gone through and before eleven o'clock that night every newspaper in London knew that Collett had either escaped or been released by his unknown captor. Arriving in his flat in Park Lane at midnight Lawford Collett was disgusted to find a dozen reporters literally waiting on the mat. He took them into his sitting room and addressed them en masse.

"I can only tell you, gentlemen, that I was kidnaped by some unknown miscreant, that I was taken on board a yacht and was put into a cabin and held prisoner. I will add to that the exciting information that for a portion of the time I was shackled. Otherwise I was not badly treated, and I was released this afternoon."

"Where was the yacht? Who captured you? What is the story of your wireless message?"

A dozen questions were shot at him. Lawford Collett satisfied them, not so far as he was able, but so far as he was willing.

"In due course the whole story will be told," he said as he shepherded them out of his apartment, "but in the meanwhile I am very anxious to get a good night's sleep."

He closed the door on them and walked thoughtfully back to his sitting room. For one who wanted sleep his conduct was peculiar. For two hours he was turning out the contents of his desk, reading and destroying papers; and when at last his bureau had been emptied to his own satisfaction he began a search of the books on his library shelf, selected a few volumes, and put them at the bottom of a trunk, which he began to pack. At seven o'clock he went up the stairs of his office in Henrietta Street and unlocked the door. He made a very careful inspection of the papers, which he knew

had already been under the scrutiny of the police. There were one or two documents to be burned, a few to be extracted from one of the deed boxes which surrounded the room and transferred to his pocket. At half past nine the banks opened and, prompt to the minute, Mr. Lawford Collett went through the swing doors of the London and Birmingham Bank, nodded to the astonished cashier and asked to see the manager.

The interview was a brief one. At its expiration, Lawford Collett presented a check for £7,300, drew the bulk of it in Bank of England notes, and stored them in various pockets. Then he went back to his flat and ordered breakfast, cutting short the expressions of delighted welcome which his servant was prepared to deliver.

"Get me my breakfast. I am leaving for the Continent by the eleven-o'clock train. Send all my letters on to the Hotel Meurice. I shall be in Paris for a fortnight."

He finished his breakfast and drove to Cook's office, and became one of a crowd that besieged the ticket counter. Presently his turn came.

"I want a first-class single fare to Christiania by way of Hull, a first-class single fare to Munich by way of Harwich-Cologne-Berlin, and a first-class single ticket to Paris via Calais," he said.

When the tickets had been made up he paid and went back to the cab which was waiting at the door of the tourist office. His two trunks he put in the baggage office at Victoria and with his suit case he walked down the subway to the Metropolitan station.

He booked to Southend by way of West Ham. From Southend he could work his way along the East Coast by easy stages to Harwich. Early in the afternoon he came to Southend, and, going into a local barber's, had his hair cut short and his upper lip shaved. These attentions, plus a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles and a bright brown suit, changed his appearance so that few would have known him.

In the afternoon he worked back to Colchester and took the night train for Ely. It would have been better for Lawford Collett if he had not been so reticent.

At two o'clock in the morning, Jimmy, returning weary and baffled to his flat, found Albert hanging on to the telephone receiver.

"They're waiting for you, sir."

"Who is it?"

"The office, sir."

Jimmy took the receiver.

"Is that Mr. Sepping?" said the voice of the night inspector. "We've just had a wire through from the Essex police. The dead body of Mr. Lawford Collett has been found in a first-class compartment."

"Dead?" said Jimmy.

"Shot at close range, according to the police report. They identified him by the name inside the hat—his pockets were empty."

## CHAPTER XXX.

### A TARDY PRECAUTION.

The murder had been committed by somebody who had probably traveled in the next compartment and had made his or her way along the footboard and, first having shot the unfortunate man through the open window, had entered the carriage and rifled his pockets. The body was then rolled beneath the seat, and was not discovered until a passenger, entering the train at Ely, had been startled to find blood on the seat. The station master at the little halfway junction where the Ely train drew up was certain that no doors were open; so it was obvious that the murder was committed in the vicinity of the junction, for the dead man's hat, by which he was identified, was found upon the road two miles south of the junction.

"He was clearly trying to get out of the country secretly," reported Jimmy to his chief. "He had changed his appearance, had his hair cut short and was clean shaven, and he had wired to Ely for a room in a false name. Collett paid his servant six months' wages, and made him a gift of the contents of the flat, confirming the gift in writing. He left his big trunks at Victoria and had only a suit case, which has also been found on the road, containing a change of clothing."

"Had he any money?"

"Over seven thousand pounds," said Jimmy. "It is gone. In many respects the murder resembles that of Parker. The man was shot close at hand, probably with a pistol fitted with a Maxim silencer, because no sound was heard by people in one of the two next compartments. My theory is that he was watched from the moment he left his flat in the morning until the moment of his death, and that the watcher was also the killer."

"Kupie?" suggested Bill Dicker, who had

apparently been up all night, for he looked tired-eyed that morning.

"I am not going to commit myself to giving the murderer a name, but I will go so far as to say that the man who killed Parker killed Collett."

"What motive do you suggest?"

"The same motive, in the case of Collett, as we supposed in the case of Parker," said Jimmy. "Collett was just going to squeak."

Bill Dicker whistled.

"You're suggesting that Collett was in the Kupie swindle?"

"There's no doubt whatever," said Jimmy quietly. "Compare the dates of Collett's rise to prosperity and you'll find that he ceased to be a police-court lawyer, living from hand to mouth on the fees he might extract from the miserable clients at Bow Street, at about the time when Kupie began his activities. Immediately after, Collett became well off; was able to take a few sober clients to give him the appearance of respectability, among whom we can put Mr. Coleman. But all the time he was the intermediary of Kupie. Don't you realize that in all the cases where the victims of Kupie paid up the negotiations were conducted through Lawford Collett?"

"But in one case Kupie was paid nothing," said Bill Dicker, shaking his head. "How do you account for that?"

"It was the first blackmail case that Kupie had attempted," said Jimmy, "and Lawford Collett handled it so skillfully that he got back the compromising letters without costing his client anything—anything, that is, except Collett's fee. What was the result of the wide publicity given to Collett's success? Every person who was blackmailed by Kupie came to Collett! The first case was sheer advertisement, designed to show what a clever fellow Collett was in getting people out of Kupie's clutches. Thereafter any person who had trouble with the blackmailer went straight away to Lawford Collett, and in the end—paid! It seems most likely that he had had a quarrel with his confederates and that he was making his way out of the country before the blow fell—another proof that Kupie is desperate. They killed Parker because he had threatened to squeak; they killed Collett for the same reason."

It was much easier to explain Collett's end than it was for Jimmy to account satisfactorily for the unprovoked attack upon Mr. Coleman. The more he thought of the unaccountable behavior of the stranger who had called at the house in Portland Place the more confounded he became. It might, of course, have been a lunatic, or some person with an old grievance against the official, or he might have mistaken him for somebody else. Who? The blow had been a terrible one and it had shaken the man—Jim had seen his hands trembling when he was describing the assault and it was not the trembling of impotent rage.

When night came Jimmy caused a message to be broadcasted to all wireless stations, in the hope that it might be picked up upon the mysterious yacht where Lawford had been a prisoner:

> Will the owner or master of the yacht upon which Mr. Lawford Collett was recently a visitor communicate immediately with Scotland Yard in the interests of justice?

There was no reply to this, and, in truth, Jimmy had not had any great expectations that there would be.

After the message had been sent he made a call at the Portland Place Hotel, to find, as he feared would be the case, that Dora was prostrate and was invisible, even to her father.

"You are perfectly sure that Collett said nothing about his experience on the yacht?" Jimmy asked Mr. Coleman for the third time that day.

"Absolutely sure," said the little man. Something of his assurance and his pomposity had gone out of him. He was a pricked bladder of his former self, almost meek, near to humbleness. Even the opinions of his exalted colleagues of the treasury seemed to carry no weight with him, nor yet the possibility of his figuring as a witness in two vulgar inquests.

"We tried to persuade Lawford to tell us, Dora and I, but you know Collett. He was flippant and elusive, as he always is, and in the end, when he went away, we were no wiser than we had been when he came."

"Had he any enemies?"

Mr. Coleman shook his head.

"I cannot tell you. I know very little about him. He was a good lawyer and a very useful man to me, as he has been to so many people. There is no clew, I suppose?"

Mr. Coleman sighed.

"Poor Dora will not eat or drink. She was very fond of Lawford," he said. "I suppose there is no doubt that it *is* Lawford?"

When Jimmy left the hotel he hardly noticed a taxicab drawn up by the curb some distance from the entrance, and he was passing without a thought when a white hand came out and beckoned him. He walked back to the cab door.

"Joan!" he said in astonishment. "What the dickens are you doing here?"

"I came after you. I've been waiting for you for hours," she said. "First I went to Scotland Yard and Mr. Dicker very kindly told me you had gone to the hotel. How is poor Dora?"

Jim shook his head.

"She is very ill, I am afraid," he said.

She hesitated.

"I suppose I ought to go and see her, but I want to speak to you so much, and I don't think Dora will want to be bothered. Will you ask if she will see me?"

Jimmy went back to the hotel and caught Mr. Coleman as he was stepping into the elevator.

"She won't see anybody," said Mr. Coleman sadly. "Will you tell Joan that she's in such a low state that the doctor has ordered her complete quiet."

He returned with the message and the girl heaved a sigh of relief.

"Step in, Jimmy, unless you've got your own car here."

"Now what is your trouble that you shadow me round London when I go about my lawful occasions?" said Jimmy as he stepped in beside her.

"Jimmy, you're either a generous darling, or I'm mad."

"Put me down generous," said Jimmy. "You are the sanest young person I know."

"But I can't accept it, Jimmy. I must find some work."

"Accept what?" he asked.

"The money you sent me."

"I didn't send you any money. Heaven knows, I wouldn't dare." There was a silence. "When did you receive it?"

"This afternoon," she said. "It came in a registered envelope—ten one-hundred-pound notes." Then: "Oh!" she said suddenly. "I wonder if it was Rex!"

"It may have been Rex, but it certainly wasn't me," said Jimmy. "Where had it been posted?"

"In central London. Naturally, that was the first thing I looked for. It was Central London G. P. O."

"Was there no letter or card?"

She shook her head.

"Nothing. Just the registration, and the sender was a 'J. Smith,' which of course is a false name. That's why I thought it was you."

"I love you for thinking so," said Jimmy softly, "but I wouldn't dare do it. Besides which, I haven't been east of Temple Bar, except when I went to Tidal Basin, for weeks and weeks."

She leaned forward and tapped at the window and the taxi moved round in a circle, heading for Oxford Street.

"You must tell me where I can drop you. I am going back to Chelsea," she said.

"Then drop me at Chelsea," said Jimmy. "I am going that way."

The cab drew up before the house and a lounger who had been strolling idly along the pavement opened the cab door and walked on.

"An obliging stranger," said the girl, and then, with a sudden start: "Who is that, Jimmy? It isn't another watcher?"

"I think it is," said Jimmy, his smile lost in the darkness. "Only he's a watcher on the right side of the law—otherwise, a detective."

"But have you got a man on guard here?"

Jimmy did not explain until after he had seen the notes that she had received. The remittance consisted of ten new hundreds, consecutively numbered.

"Wait a moment," he said, and took out his pocketbook, in which, he remembered, he had put down details of the notes which Rex had drawn from the bank. At the very first glance he saw that these ten were part of the series which had been paid to Walton. "Your little mystery is cleared up. They're from Rex," he said, and showed her the entry in his book.

She looked at the notes in silence.

"I'm glad he sent the money, for the thought behind it," she said at last. "Jimmy, is it true that Mr. Collett has been murdered? I've only seen a brief account in the evening newspapers."

"Quite true," he answered soberly.

"What is the meaning of it all?" she asked. "Has—has Rex anything to do with it?"

"Probably Rex and his million pounds," said Jimmy. "If you mean, did Rex kill Collett, my answer is an emphatic 'no.' Lawford Collett was killed by somebody who believed he had betrayed them."

It was then that she asked about the man on guard outside the house.

"He isn't exactly on guard," he said carefully, "but he's here or hereabouts in case somebody comes along who—well, it is difficult to explain."

"You think I am in some danger?" Her voice was steady and her grave eyes fixed him soberly.

"I think we're all in danger," he evaded. "At least, we shall be until we lay Kupie where he belongs."

"Then you believe that Kupie is responsible for these terrible crimes?"

"I am certain of that," he answered promptly.

There was no advantage in mystifying her and it was well that she should know the extent of the danger which threatened. "The two men who were watching your house and the two who were listening in to your telephone were not behaving in that extraordinary way from any love of adventure. Two, at least, were desperadoes of the worst type—gunmen who can still be hired in this city to terrorize, if not to shoot. One of them, at any rate, did shoot," he added with a little smile as he remembered his own experience.

"Why were they watching?" she asked.

"They were watching for Rex."

She uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"Rex? Whatever did they want with Rex?"

"They wanted to prevent him from coming back to the house. They were keen on preventing his communicating with you in any way. That is the vital and simple explanation of the care they took to cut into your telephone line and to watch your house. I haven't the slightest doubt that if Rex had returned two or three days after his disappearance he would have been killed on your doorstep. That is the view of Digger."

"Where is Rex now?" she asked, but he shook his head.

"I don't know. I don't even understand the mystery of his disappearance. I understand less why he should remain away, though it is extremely probable that he knew about these watchers. I've made inquiries, Joan, and I've found that your house was not the only one guarded. Men have been seen outside the flats in which I live, and probably Rex, when I spotted him from the window, saw these gentlemen also. There is a chance—the merest chance—that Kupie still is determined to prevent Rex Walton's return. If that is so he will leave no stone unturned to achieve his object. I am afraid you'll have to endure the nuisance of a shadow for the next week or two."

He was worried about her, for at the back of his mind there lurked an uneasy sense of danger to the girl. In what manner and from what direction harm would come to her he could not guess; but he sensed the malignity and the desperation which supported all Kupie's acts. Men who did not hesitate to kill their former colleagues, who did to death one of their own leaders, in Parker, would not stop for a second to consider this girl if she stood in their path.

Kupie had assumed a new guise and a new significance. No longer was he the blackmailing letter writer. He was something far more sinister. Jimmy spoke his thoughts aloud when he said:

"I do not think that Kupie will ever write another letter—and that is all to the good."

"Why?" she asked in surprise.

"Because he has accomplished his purpose. He set himself out to get your brother's million pounds and he has got them."

She looked at him open-mouthed.

"Do you really mean that?" she asked in a hushed tone.

"I really think so. There can be no other explanation of why Rex is keeping in the background."

He wanted to ask her whether there were any firearms in the house, but he didn't like to alarm her. Instead, he made an excuse to see the butler, a man of vigorous middle age. It was while the girl had gone upstairs—Jimmy had sent her in search of the envelope in which the notes had come—that he took the butler into his confidence.

"Thank you, sir, for warning me," said the man quietly. "I am not a bit surprised, for I knew when Mr. Rex disappeared there was more trouble coming. I've an army revolver in the house and all the doors are fitted with burglar alarms. What time would you imagine they are likely to come, if they came at all?"

Jimmy hazarded a guess.

"Between twelve and three," he said. "After that it is too light; before then the house is awake."

"Very good, sir," said the man in a determined tone. "I don't go to bed till three o'clock in the morning. I'll have to make some sort of explanation to Miss Walton."

"You can tell her that I have asked you to stay up until three for any late messenger that may come from Scotland Yard."

As a matter of fact, he saved the butler the embarrassment of invention by informing the girl himself.

If Kupie struck, he would strike quickly —that was a certainty. If he had, for his own purpose, any designs on the safety or life of the girl he would not delay action very much longer.

After Jimmy had gone to bed that night he got up again to telephone to the Yard and order the reënforcement of the watch outside Cadogan Place by yet another man. This precaution was justified, but, as it proved, a little tardy.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### IN THE NIGHT.

Philip, the butler, found himself nodding over the book he was reading; and, getting up from the chair, where he had been half dozing and half reading, stretched himself and yawned. He looked at the clock; the minute hand pointed to half past one. He lit a ring on the gas range, put on a kettle of water, and then, stepping noiselessly into the butler's pantry, which led from the kitchen, he made his second tour of the house, stopping to examine the doors and such of the windows as led onto the landings. He saw nothing to excite his suspicion, except, when he came down the stairs, he detected from the corner of his eye a momentary flash of light upon the stained-glass pane of a large window which lit the first landing. He turned quickly but the light was gone. Deciding it was a trick of eyesight he returned to the pantry and brewed himself a cup of tea.

Twice in the course of his vigil he had looked out through the windows in the darkened dining room and had gained some satisfaction from the sight of the man who was patrolling the pavement outside. And now, feeling unaccountably lonely, and for some reason nervous, he put down his half-empty cup and went up the short flight of stairs, along the hall and into the drawing-room, and again peeped into the street. The detective on guard was nowhere in sight.

Minutes passed but there was no sign of the detective. He thought he would open the door and look out, but hesitated with his finger on the latch. It was now a quarter to two, and he walked slowly back toward the pantry, his hand on the butt of the revolver in his jacket pocket. He was halfway down the steps when he stopped. The pantry light was out and there swept up to him a draft of air which could only be accounted for by the kitchen door being open.

He pulled out his revolver and thumbed back the hammer. Then, stepping stealthily downward, he put his hand into the black doorway for the electric switch. He heard the whistle of something falling, and tried to dodge back; but it was too late. A loaded cane crashed down on his unprotected head and he fell like a log. The dark figure that had struck him down lifted and carried him into the kitchen.

"Put a serviette in his mouth and tie his hands," he said, and the man who was with him obeyed.

Joan did not sleep well that night. Perhaps it was Jimmy's warning which had perturbed her; more likely, it was the closeness of the night. She tried to read herself to sleep, but, though she made her eyes ache, sleep did not come.

The window opposite her bed was open a little at the top, a little more at the bottom; and when, at half past one, the stuffiness of the night was relieved by a gentle wind her eyes closed and she was almost asleep when something woke her. It was the creak of a board and it came from outside her door. Instantly she was awake and with wildly beating heart was standing by the foot of the bed. She crept softly across the floor until she stood by the door, the knob under her hand. No other sound came but presently her blood froze with horror as she felt the knob turning slowly in her hand. Fortunately the door was always locked and bolted, and she heard a whispered colloquy.

"Who's there?" she asked, keeping her voice under control.

"It is Philip, miss," whispered somebody, and her hand was on the key when she remembered and drew it back as though the iron were hot. Philip would not try the handle of her door without knocking.

"Wait a moment, Philip," she said, striving hard not to betray her terror. "I will put on my dressing gown."

First she switched on the lights and going back to her bed began to dress. Her hands were trembling to such an extent that she found it almost impossible to fasten the garments as she put them on; and apparently the men outside grew impatient, for presently the one who had spoken said:

"How long are you going to be, miss? It is important."

"I shan't be long, Philip," she said.

The bed rested on easy-running castors, and, exerting all her strength, she dragged the sturdy brass bedstead across the room and pushed its back to the door. As she did so there was a crash and a panel of the door quivered. They were breaking in. She looked round wildly for some weapon and saw that on her dressing table was a big silver hand mirror. She snatched it up and as a man's arm came through one of the shattered panels and reached for the key she brought the glass down upon the wrist with all her might. There was a yell of pain and the hand was withdrawn.

She did not expect help from Philip; she knew he must be incapable of assisting her, otherwise they would not dare to have made so open an attack. From the region above came a scream. One of the women servants had wakened, and had heard the man outside say: "Put your shoulder to the door."

The lock broke but the bed held the door in its place. And then, from downstairs, came the sound of a rattling knocker. Somebody was trying to gain admission. She heard the startled exclamation of the second man.

"Go down and get him," whispered the other, and for a few minutes Joan had a respite. She utilized this to drag a table forward so that it wedged between the dressing table and the bed.

Who had knocked? In a flash she realized that whoever it was, was in peril, and throwing up the window she cried down:

"Be careful. A man is coming down to —to—get you." She could think of no other word, but that she emphasized.

"Is that you, Miss Walton? Is anything wrong?" called the man on the steps below.

"Yes—yes, please. Somebody is trying to get into my room."

So far she got when a police whistle sounded shrilly. The sound of the whistle reached the man on guard outside the door and she heard him curse and the thud of his stockinged boots as he flew down the stairs. She dared not follow, even to let in the police.

On the dressing table lay the bag she had put down when she had come back with Jimmy. She remembered that in one of the pockets was the key to the front door. Her hand shook as she took it out, and, leaning out of the window, she called again.

"I am throwing down the key."

She saw a dark figure come out of the portico onto the sidewalk. There was a ring of metal as the key struck the road, and then:

"I've got it," said the man.

Five minutes later, shaking from head to foot, she was pushing back the bed to admit him.

He was a constable from Scotland Yard and he heard her brief but incoherent story with a worried frown.

"There was an officer on duty outside. Have you seen or heard of him?" he asked.

"No—I don't know—I haven't seen anybody," she said.

She was very white, and in his alarm he thought she was going to faint and poured out a glass of water. But Joan's resolution overcame her weakness.

"We must find Philip," she said; "the butler, I mean. I know he hasn't gone to bed because he told me he was waiting up till three in case Captain Sepping called."

"I'll go down and look for him."

"May I come?" she asked nervously. "Of course, I know there's no danger, but I'd rather be with you."

He stopped in the hall to make a quick inspection of her little sitting room and the dining room behind; then he went down the stairs toward the kitchen. He had not put a foot inside the butler's pantry when the groans of Philip came to him.

"'Coshed,'" he said tersely. "Kupie always 'coshes.' It is a peculiarity of his."

She had not heard the word before but she guessed its meaning. Lifting the half-swooning man to a chair, he bathed his face with water and presently Philip opened his eyes and looked stupidly from one to the other.

"Thank God you're safe, miss!" he muttered, and fainted again.

Between them they got him on to a couch in his little room. Then the detective went to telephone. He returned in a few minutes.

"Your wire is cut," he said. "I've sent a policeman for the doctor."

By this time there were four uniformed men on the sidewalk outside the house and it was one of these who roused Jimmy Sepping. That young man went to the door, knowing instinctively that something had happened to Joan. In a few words the constable acquainted him with what had happened and Jimmy dressed quickly and was at Cadogan Place before the butler had recovered consciousness.

"What happened to the other officer?" asked Jimmy when the second detective met him at the door.

"We found him in the area, sir. He must have been beaten by somebody who came up behind him."

He inspected the kitchen door. Two circular holes were cut at the top and the bottom and through these apertures the bolts must have been drawn.

"I heard nothing at all," protested Philip, who had now recovered sufficiently to tell his story. "It is surprising how they did it."

Jimmy was not at all surprised. He knew the instrument which had been employed, that silent woodcutter which forms a part of every up-to-date burglar's kit.

He had been right. Kupie had lost no time. What he intended to do with the girl Jimmy could only surmise.

"They didn't want to harm you here, otherwise they would have shot through the panel," he said. "They could have got you easily."

"Then what do you think they wanted?" asked the girl.

"To take you away somewhere, to hold you as a hostage to—— By gosh! I've got it! You were going to be the bait to bring Rex into the open!"

The inspiration flashed upon him at that moment and he was convinced that he was right. Kupie's desperation was growing as the hours passed and Kupie's desperation had to do with Rex Walton's disappearance.

The day was dawning when he went home, this time leaving two officers inside the house. He knew that Kupie had not played his last card.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### ANOTHER BLOW.

This last and most audacious outrage was by no means destined to be the final effort of the mysterious agencies against which the police were fighting. It seemed as if the attempt to capture Joan marked the beginning of a new campaign of terror, for the events which followed quick upon one another were as daring as, in some cases, they were inexplicable.

The days that followed were days of intense mental strain to Jimmy Sepping. In that time he did not see any of the other actors in this strange and terrible drama which was being enacted in the very heart of London, but he kept himself informed by telephone of Dora's condition and on the morning of the second day he had the dubious satisfaction of learning that she was well enough to get up and that she was going down to Marlow that day.

The first hearings of the inquests upon Parker and Lawford Collett were to be formal, the police having asked for a fortnight's adjournment in order to procure fresh evidence.

"Which means," said Jimmy, "any evidence at all!"

"By the way, I've had a Kupie letter," said Dicker, "telling me to keep out of the case—the same paper but not the same handwriting. I suppose you've had a similarly friendly warning?"

Jimmy laughed quietly.

"So long ago that I'd almost forgotten that I had it," he said. "I think that will be the only kind of letter that Kupie will write."

"You mean that he's dropped his blackmailing? Very likely you're correct," said Dicker thoughtfully. "But it would be unwise to prophesy what move he will make next."

In the afternoon occurred an incident, trivial in itself, yet to Jimmy's mind associated with the more serious crimes which had been committed in the name of Kupie. The woman who acted as housekeeper to Mr. Coleman had taken down the curtains in the bedroom where the murder was committed and having packed these in a box with other articles which needed cleaning had telephoned to a Chiswick firm of cleaners to collect them. At half past four the collecting van, a small Ford lorry, called at Portland Place. The man carried out the box, put it in the van, and continued on his round. Eventually he reached Richmond, where the last of his calls was to be made. Ordinarily, he had a small boy, who acted as vanguard, but the lad had been sent to pick up a parcel from a house

on Richmond Terrace, what time the driver was collecting a box from a hotel. On the arrival of the van at Twickenham one of the boxes was found to be missing, and, on checking his list, the driver discovered that it was Mr. Coleman's.

A complaint was made to the Richmond police, and, on inquiry, the local officers learned that a man had seen a car drive up behind the cleaners' lorry; the driver had descended, jumped into the van, and presently had come back with a box which he had handed to a second man, described by the witness as looking like a sailor; then the car had driven off. When the driver of the lorry was interviewed, he remembered that, all the way from London, he had been shadowed by a large Spanz car.

This incident in itself might have been passed over as being without importance, for no day passes that does not bring its full crop of larcenies, though small thieves do not as a rule tour the country in a big limousine. But on the following morning Mr. Coleman's butler, Bennett, dispatched a box to Marlow. It contained the books for which Dora had telephoned, her little library. These Bennett had packed in a small sugar case, and, putting them on a taxi, had taken them to the Great Western station and had paid for their transmission by passenger train to Marlow. Apparently, the case was transferred at Maidenhead to the branch train and had been left standing with other baggage on the platform. It was then put into the guard's van of the local train and was again transferred at Bourne End. This time it was placed in an empty van at the far end of the train. On arriving at Marlow, a very short distance, the guard went to the van to get out the case and to his amazement found that the box had been broken open; the books were thrown out on to the floor, except a few which remained at the bottom of the box. Again evidence was forthcoming. A railroad workman had seen somebody whom he described as a middle-aged man in spectacles climbing along the footboard toward the luggage van, when the train was about a mile out of Bourne End.

The third incident was more serious and it was this which was reported to Scotland Yard. Mr. Coleman had ordered his butler to take a small grip, containing a change of clothes, sleeping suit and shaving materials, to the baggage office at Paddington, in preparation for the week-end visit which he was paying to his country house. The car was at Marlow, and Bennett, who was an athletic man, decided to walk to the station. The bag was not heavy and it was a beautiful night. Dusk had fallen, though the afterglow of the sunset still lingered in the sky, and there were very few people about, because it was the hour when the pleasure seekers were still in the theaters.

At the top of Portland Place is a crescent-shaped garden railed off from the road, and the private property of the residents of Portland Crescent. He had crossed the road, and was walking parallel with the railings of the garden, abreast of the gate which gives access to these private grounds, when it was opened, the bag was snatched from him, and a sponge soaked in ammonia was thrown in his face. The fumes of the ammonia paralyzed him momentarily and when he recovered and found a policeman his assailant had gone.

There was little doubt that he had been shadowed and that the robbery had been carefully planned. The man who had attacked him had been lying in wait in the garden and probably, if Bennett had not crossed the road, the stranger in ambush would have come out to meet him.

The bag was afterward found in the garden, with its contents scattered about the green lawn. Jimmy, his curiosity aroused, called on Mr. Coleman, who was still at the hotel, but spent most of his evenings at the house.

"I can't understand it," said Mr. Coleman peevishly. "And really, I'm tired of complaining to the police."

"Was there anything of value in the bag?"

"Nothing at all," said Mr. Coleman emphatically. "Nothing!"

"It is extraordinary," said Jimmy, for the *n*th time since he had come into this remarkable case. "I have never known thieves so capricious. Your man wouldn't be able to identify the fellow who attacked him?"

Mr. Coleman shook his head.

On top of these occurrences he received an unexpected visit from Joan. That morning she had received a letter bearing the Marlow postmark. She recognized the handwriting; it was from Dora, and ran:

MY DEAR GIRL: Won't you come down and stay with me and clear my mind of horrors?

This is a beautiful little place, very quiet and very dull. The house is on backwater, with a glimpse of the real river from my window, and we have a beautiful little electric launch. Doesn't that appeal to you? Also, father has engaged two stalwart gardeners to keep Kupie at bay. That, I think, will make even a greater appeal. I am trying to forget poor Lawford's death and the shocking end of Parker. It is difficult. Father will probably come for week-ends but I will be tactful and prevent his boring you with abstract economics. Do come, please!

Jimmy's face fell when he read the letter.

"I hate your going there," he said, "and I feel I'm a brute in making the suggestion, but it is going to be very difficult to look after you. While you are in the metropolitan area I can assure your safety; but once you pass into the area of the Buckinghamshire police it is going to be difficult."

She was disappointed and a little stubborn.

"I've got to get away from London," she said. "The house is on my nerves."

Jimmy recognized the force of her argument.

"Besides," she said, "Dora has her 'two stalwart gardeners,' and there's no danger at all for me. Please may I go?"

"I suppose you may," he said reluctantly, "though you're going to add to my anxieties. No, I don't mean that," he said hastily when he saw the look in her face. "I'm being selfish. Go along; I think Dora will be glad to have you with her."

"Riverside" was a stone-and-wood bungalow set on the reed-grown banks of a little backwater. It was not actually in Marlow, being a mile from the town itself, and this, from Joan's point of view, was all to the good. Dora met her at the station and she was looking better than Joan had expected. They made their way across the old bridge and turned down the long country lane which led to Riverside.

The bungalow—for it was no more—was hidden from the road behind a belt of pines. The house was prettily furnished, the rooms airy and light. Joan sank into a deep cane chair in her big bedroom, fragrant with the aroma of early mignonette; and for the first time for many weeks felt at peace. A French window gave onto a little balcony over the porch, and this was lined with window boxes. She looked down at the two supporting pillars and it occurred to her how much easier it would be to escape than it was from her bedroom in Cadogan Place. She laughed softly at the absurd thought. "Nerves, my dear," she said.

After she had changed she joined Dora on the lawn sloping down to the backwater. A long and narrow island running parallel with the bank shut out the view of the river, except beyond the eastern end of the island.

"Here is the boathouse. It isn't really a boathouse at all," she smiled. "It is just a roof over water. And here is the launch—I'll show you how to drive her."

For an hour the visitor was immersed in the technique of electrical craft. Dora had thrown off her gloom and was her old bright self and neither she nor her guest made any reference to the tragedy until they sat in the big common room after dinner. The night was chilly and a small log fire burned in the open hearth.

"Did I ever tell you that Lawford wanted to marry me?" asked Dora unexpectedly. A smoldering cigarette was between her white fingers and her beautiful eyes gazed abstractedly at the fire.

"How many people have wanted to marry you?" asked Joan and was a little shocked at her own crudeness.

"Oh, a lot of people," said Dora vaguely. "Some men ask you to marry them with the same readiness as I would ask you to dinner. The matrimonial habit is very strong in a certain type of man! Your experience must have also commenced."

She turned her eyes to the girl, and Joan flushed.

"No, nobody has ever proposed to me yet," she said.

"I think Jimmy will one day," said Dora quietly, and Joan turned the subject.

"Why do you speak of Lawford?"

"I was thinking of him," replied Dora absently. "I liked Lawford. I could never have married him but there was a lot that was very fine about him. Joan, do you know the most terrible experience any human being could have?"

Joan shook her head.

"It is to be tied to your hobby," said the girl; "and to be forced into continuing your play. At first it is all very delightful and thrilling, but there comes a time when you just want to drop playing. And then you find you're chained—oh, the burden and weariness of it!"

Joan stared at her in amazement.

"Your mind works off at a tangent, Dora. What were you thinking about then?"

"Oh, just thinking," said Dora, throwing her cigarette into the fireplace and rising abruptly.

But Joan was not to be put off.

"Whom were you playing with? You weren't playing with Rex? You were serious there, Dora?"

The girl nodded slowly.

"Yes, I was serious there. I didn't know how serious until——"

Again her wayward mood was expressed in the sudden change of subject.

"Do you remember the girl Rex was going to marry before—you know? Edith—I don't know her full name."

"Yes, she was murdered," said Joan. "I say 'murdered,' I think advisedly, because it was wicked to write to her, as this dreadful Kupie did, and tell her that her secret was known. Poor Edie!"

"Poor Edie!" repeated the other almost mechanically. "Poor Lawford! Poor Parker! Victims of insatiable greed."

"Kupie's?"

Dora sighed.

"I don't know," she said shortly.

Joan slept as well that night as Dora could have wished and woke to find Dora's maid arranging a dainty china tea service by the side of her bed.

"Miss Coleman has gone on the river, madam," said the woman. "She said you were not to be wakened until ten o'clock."

"Is it ten o'clock?" said Joan, sitting up with a gasp.

When she went out on to the lawn Dora was pulling to the little quay with long, slow, steady strokes. She shipped her oars and jumped lightly to land.

"If you'd been up we would have had a swim," she said, but Joan was staring at her.

"What is the matter with your face?" she asked.

The fair skin of the girl flushed.

"Nothing very much," she said, and the mark Joan had seen was emphasized. "I went ashore on one of the little islands and stumbled."

Joan did not question her further. But she knew that the bruise on Dora Coleman's face was not due to a fall. For as the color had come to her cheeks the finger marks of a blow struck with an open hand were unmistakable.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### ON THE RIVER.

Joan made no further reference to the blow on the girl's face, but strolled round the bay to avoid even looking at her. Outwardly, at any rate, Dora was unchanged. They went together in the launch to Henley, had tea, and came back in the dusk of the evening just in time for dinner. When she did eventually steal a glance at the telltale mark she noticed that Dora had used powder lavishly—which was not like Dora.

"Father will be coming down to-morrow or the next day," she said when they were again on the comfortable settee before the fire. "He telephoned me this afternoon. Your Jimmy and that big man—what is his name, Dicker?—have been bothering him with questions. It is all very necessary—I realize that—but poor old daddy so easily gets worried."

As the evening progressed her pretense of cheerfulness gradually wore thin. She was nervous, started at the slightest sound. Joan detected her once, her head bent in a listening attitude, and asked her what she was hearing.

"I don't know. I was thinking," she said. "Come up to my room, will you, Joan?"

She led Joan into her own bedroom. It was more simply furnished than that which she had given to her guest. There was a big writing table against the wall between the windows, and to this she went, first pulling down the blinds and drawing the curtains. Opening the drawer, her hand disappeared to the back, and came out holding a short-barreled Browning pistol.

"Have you ever used one of these?" she asked with affected carelessness.

Joan nodded.

"Yes, Rex taught me to shoot when I was quite a little girl. Why?"

Dora pulled back the jacket of the weapon and slid it back again, satisfied.

"There's a cartridge in the chamber and I think there are nine in the magazine," she said. "You know how to work the safety catch? I have put it up now."

"But what on earth——" began Joan.

"Just nerves. I feel that you're ever so much more capable than I am to-night—that is why I am lending you my little guardian angel. Come along."

Her arm about the girl's shoulder, they passed into Joan's bedroom and again it was

the hostess who pulled down the blinds and drew the curtains.

"There is excellent ventilation in this room, so, unless you're a fresh-air fiend, you need not open the windows. In fact, I think I should keep them fastened," she said.

"But why ever?" asked Joan quickly. "Is anything wrong?"

Dora shook her head.

"I don't know that anything is wrong, except everything," she said inconsistently.

Joan saw her to the door and closed it, and then, after a second of indecision, turned the key in the lock.

Five minutes after getting into bed she was asleep and she did not wake again until a foot touched one of the legs of the bed. The jar brought her to instant wakefulness and she sat up. The room was in thick darkness; she could see nothing. Only she knew that somebody was in the room; she could hear their quiet breathing.

For a second or so a curious icy sensation ran down her spine and then she remembered the Browning and stretched out her hand. It was there and her fingers closed on the butt.

"Don't strike a light or you'll be sorry," said a deep voice at the foot of the bed.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"Get up. I want you," said the voice again, and in the desperation of fear she thumbed down the safety catch and gripped the trigger convulsively.

Two shots rang out almost as one. She heard the splintering of glass and a smothered cry of fear from the man. In another second she had sprung from her bed, torn aside the curtains and flung open the French windows that led to the balcony.

She did not know what she was doing; in her heart was a horror that was inexpressible in words, a horror that drowned all reason. She turned, facing the window, her pistol leveled.

"I will kill you if you come near me," she breathed.

Then, in a flash, she was over the parapet and was scrambling down the wooden pillar. Her hands were cut with splinters and bleeding, but she kept tight hold of her pistol.

Which way should she go? She might have waited in the room until assistance arrived but she dared not remain another second in that awful presence.

Marlow was a mile away. It was still dark, though the east was lightening. And then she remembered the launch, and fled barefooted across the lawn to the boat shed.

She tugged at the chain and the padlock gave. At first she thought a miracle had happened; then she remembered that it had been her task to fasten the launch when they came back from Henley and that she had forgotten to ask for the key. As the chain fell into the water with a splash she pulled back the lever and the tiny propeller began to revolve.

They were coming after her. She heard the thump of rowlocks, and her boat was moving none too fast. The batteries were running out! Dora had told her that they must be recharged in the morning.

Nearer and nearer came the boat, and then——

*Crash!*

She was thrown forward on to her face. In her anxiety she had not kept too vigilant an outlook and she had collided with some obstacle in the river. When she recovered her scattered senses she found herself lying in two inches of water, for the launch had holed. The pursuing boat was near. She felt round for her pistol, which had been put upon the seat by her side, and with a gasp of dismay touched nothing. She searched wildly; it had disappeared—probably had been thrown overboard in the shock of the collision.

Ahead of her was the dark stern of a barge and the current was carrying the sinking boat toward it. She gripped the low gunwale.

"Now, Miss Joan Walton!" cried the exultant voice of one of the rowers, and a hand gripped her arm.

*To be concluded in the next issue, August 20th.*

# The Vanishing Shower

By Robert H. Rohde

*Author of "The Talking Head," "The Gifted Miss Gates," Etc.*

**The Great Macumber proves that there may be more to a house detective's job than meets the casual eye.**

AN elderly gentleman whose face was as free of wrinkles as his flawless cutaway—a personage made vivid by the whitest of mustaches and the pinkest of complexions—came hurrying across the sidewalk to welcome us as the taxi in which the Great Macumber and I had covered the final fraction of our return journey from the Magicians' Guild convention in Cleveland drew up at the Hotel Rawley.

Excepting that he was attired rather for the afternoon than for the evening this cherubic patriarch might have been the twin of the princely gourmet in whose expression of pleased astonishment a million subway riders are invited daily to see reflected the excellence of Viceroy Sauce. His carriage was soldierly, his aplomb ambassadorial. A stranger would have said unhesitatingly that here was one to be greeted with dignity holding a meed of deference.

But Macumber, leaping from the cab, was inspired to lay a desecrating and violent hand against the back of the formal coat.

"Ah, Jerry!" he cried. "The sight of you's the solace of my own advancing years. To see you at seventy-eight——"

"Sixty-eight next November," corrected Jeremiah Madigan, Beau Brummel of the New York detective bureau in his day and in his retirement from active police duty certainly the most distinguished if not the busiest member of the Hotel Rawley staff. "You *will* keep losin' track, professor!"

The Great One mastered a smile. This was a routine jest.

"If you were to say fifty-eight no one could doubt you, sergeant," said he, applying the emollient of the central-office title that Jerry Madigan had laid aside long since with his shield. "It could as well be thirty-eight if you'd tone up the hair and mustache with—not dye, you understand, but one of those remarkable discoveries which restore the natural coloring."

The resplendent house detective's cheeks grew a shade pinker. As he led the way into the lobby something that might have been a sigh rippled the broadcloth of the back-hugging cutaway.

"If they didn't know me so well I'd do it," he said, drawing us into the shadowed corner from which he habitually kept watch on the comings and goings of the Rawley's guests. "And then you see me downtown beggin' for the old job back, don't you?"

Macumber took his pipe from his pocket and from its bowl drew—or so it would have seemed to the casual onlooker—a long, black and gorgeously banded panetela.

"Smoke this and try to forget where it came from, Jerry," he invited. "Do you mean you're finding hotel life monotonous?"

"I guess I'm still too young for this kind of work," confided Madigan. "'Twould be a better job for a man that had had his detective trainin' by way of a correspondence course. For some one that's had the pick of headquarters assignments in his time, it's——"

Jerry's teeth bit savagely through the end of the Great One's cigar.

"It's unshirted hell, and that's no lie," he went on. "Not a year passed while I was in the bureau but what I had a job that took me across the continent or across the ocean. There was them that laughed behind their hands because a good half of my pay went onto my back—but them same ones always got the go-by when a fancy job came along, it could have been noticed."

"They did," agreed Macumber; "and well within my own memory the name of Sergeant Jeremiah Madigan has been printed large on the front pages of the newspapers. But why the special grouch just now against the service of the Hotel Rawley? What's been happening while the youngster and I have been away?"

"Nothing," reported Madigan sorrowfully. "Nothing but the same old thing. Nothing but tourin' the rooms of strangers lettin' a whole week pass without settlin', to see how good their baggage looks. Nothing but chasin' bags and umbrellas mislaid by absent-minded old ladies that had ought to be puttin' up at a sanitarium instead of a quiet theatrical house like the Rawley. Nothing but——"

"You're sure, Jerry," interrupted the Great One, grinning, "that a certain rather irritable old gentleman isn't at least partly responsible for your mood?"

"Beau" Madigan's mouth fell open.

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"It was no more," said Macumber, "than a deduction based on a hard look that your eyes have held for the last couple of minutes. That look, if I'm not mistaken, has been following the peregrinations of a man certainly past middle age who came into the lobby in our wake and just now stepped into the elevator—a tall and cadaverous dyspeptic-looking person with thick eyeglasses who had some sort of wrangle at the desk when he got his key and his mail. He is irritable, isn't he, Jerry? Haven't *you* found him so?"

"Irritable!" snorted the house detective. "That's only half of what ails him. He's nutty. Your guess is right, professor; it's him that has made me realize finally just how far I've sunk, now that you put me in mind of it. I've heard all sorts of things reported stolen in my day, from family Bibles to actresses' bracelets, but it's been left for this dippy duck in No. 917 to come along with a squawk about somebody liftin' a nickel-plated shower bath! Yes, sir, that's '917's' regular kick—somebody's swiped his shower!"

A twinkle that betrayed real interest as well as amusement flashed in the Great One's eyes. He dropped into one of the big cool leather-covered chairs grouped in the corner favored by Jerry Madigan.

"That *is* a novel complaint, sergeant," said he. "I absolutely and irrevocably refuse to leave you until I've had every detail of the case of the stolen shower."

"But it isn't a case," protested Madigan. "Not a case for a detective, anyhow. It's a doctor that 917 should have been consultin'. Nobody's bothered his shower. He's just off his head. It's been fearful hot the last couple of weeks while you've been out of town, professor."

Macumber shook his head.

"That won't do, Jerry," he said. "You've started something that sounds entertaining, and you've got to finish it. What sort of shower is it that your friend in No. 917 has been stirring up a rumpus about? One of those detachable rubber-hose contrivances that people——"

"Now your guess is wrong," replied Madigan. "It's a standard built-in shower like you'll find in at least half of the Rawley's private baths and which couldn't be took out with anything short of a full kit of plumber's tools. Soon as I knew *that* was what he was talkin' about I had his number, of course. And when he came around this mornin' with the selfsame kick about the selfsame shower I felt like callin' the doctor for him myself."

The sergeant's air as he turned his inquisitorial gaze upon a tall woman who had come in from the street at that moment, bringing in her wake such a wafting riot of perfumes as called to my mind the old "Battle of the Flowers" ballet, bespoke a conviction he had milked his subject dry.

"Remember her?" he asked, nudging Macumber and shifting to a more auspicious topic. "If I could stage a comeback like that lacquered lady!"

"I'm trying to place her," said the Great One. "Wait a minute! She's—by Julius! She's Nina Stoddard! It must be ten years since I last heard of her; and she'd had a far fall from stardom then. A 'comeback,' you say? What's she doing now, Jerry?"

"I s'pose *you* wouldn't know, at that," replied Madigan with satisfaction. "But I've been keepin' as close track of stage people since I've been here at the Rawley as I used to of high-class con men downtown. Nina's had a hard row of it, from all I hear. Her earlier history I don't guess I need to tell you—how one play after another flopped under her until there wasn't a manager on Broadway could remember what a hit she was once upon a time. It got so she couldn't even get a small part in New York and she dropped out altogether. But you've got to hand it to the old girl, professor. She didn't quit the stage—just Broadway. For quite a few years she played in stock up State and in the Middle West. She had her eye peeled for an angel and she landed one. Last season she was out at the head of her own company. The angel actually came through a winner and they say Nina's name will be helpin' light Times Square again this comin' fall regardless of expense.

"Good for her!" said Macumber. "That's interesting and pleasant to hear. But how about this mysterious theft of the shower bath you were telling about?"

The elegant ex-policeman shrugged.

"What else is there to tell?" he demanded. "This lunatic in No. 917 made a holler at the desk yesterday mornin'. He wanted to know what the management meant by takin' out his shower, and got so excited they decided to just humor him. Soft words calmed him and by and by when I came on they told me to run up to No. 917 and see what was wrong. I let myself in with a passkey and looked in the bathroom. There was the shower right where it belonged, complete with pipes and faucets and rubber curtain, and no sign it had been anywhere else."

"Of course," said the Great One. "I'd stake your eyesight any time against that of the obviously myopic 917. However, you've not explained your run-in with the gentleman."

Jerry Madigan's brow contracted at the memory.

"Run-in the first," he said, "was when he came back to the hotel yesterday afternoon. I was on the lookout for him and went up in the elevator with him, pretendin' to have other business on the ninth floor. When we stepped out of the car I told him I guessed he'd find everything all right. 'The shower's been put back, then?' says he. He was so huffy that I didn't say a word until he'd looked in his bathroom and satisfied himself. 'Very good,' says he. 'And would you be kind enough to tell them at the office that I want not only my personal belongings but all the conveniences I rent from the hotel left strictly alone as long as I'm a guest here?'

"He says this, mind you, in the tone a man might use to a bell hop that had got gay with him. So says I: 'Maybe it's your sight that was to blame, mister.' And 917 comes back, a little sharper: 'I didn't have any trouble seeing the shower any other morning, and I've been stopping here more than a week now!'"

The Great One was smiling broadly.

"So that," he suggested, "was where the trouble really started?"

"Nope," said Madigan. "I just turned and walked out. The real fuss came this mornin'."

"Complaints to the management concerning your lack of sympathy?"

"Nope again. Nothing of the kind. The complaint that 917 had to make he made direct to me. He walked up to me no sooner'n I came in the door at ten o'clock. 'I've been waitin' down here for you ever since I finished my breakfast, Mister House Detective,' says he. 'I thought I'd like to see whether your sight is still better than mine *to-day*. My shower bath's been taken away again!'"

Macumber slapped the arm of his chair.

"Magnificent!" he cried. But no answering grin appeared on the face of the indignant Madigan.

"I told him," he continued, scowling more profoundly, "that I could stand a lot of convincin' that a crime had been committed before I could see myself gettin' het up. 'Come right on upstairs,' says he. 'The shower's gone this time and no doubt about it.'

"Upstairs we went, professor, and 917—whose name I'd found out is J. Thomas Rotherham—stumbled across the room and yanked open the door of his bath in the corner. 'Look for yourself, Mister Pinkerton,' he says, very polite and sarcastic; and then I saw his face change. His eyes got goggly behind those thick specs of his, and his jaw

twisted off to one side in a way that would have been comical if I hadn't been so peeved at him.

" 'Great heavens!' yelps Rotherham, all flustered. 'It's back again. They managed to get it back in place again while I was at breakfast. What can be the meanin' of this?'

" '*They* did, eh?' says I, walkin' into the bathroom and givin' the shower the up and down. 'Well, after lookin' at the screw heads and the plaster I'm ready to make affidavit that there contraption ain't been off the wall since it was first hitched onto it.'

"Rotherham didn't say anything for a minute. He took off his glasses and polished them careful with his handkerchief.

" 'I fancy,' he speculates, by and by, 'that you think I'm crazy.'

" 'It ain't any part of my business,' I come back, 'to figure what's wrong with you. But one thing I *will* say: the part of your head that your fancies come out of is in good workin' order!' "

Jerry Madigan flipped the cold ash from the gift panetela.

"Not another word did I say to the man," he concluded. "Can you imagine him complainin' at the office about *that?*"

Macumber had given close attention to Madigan from the beginning of the queer story of the vanishing shower but its climax had caught him preoccupied. His eyes when I had last observed him had been on the house detective. Now, alight with another interest, they were directed across the lobby toward the hotel desk.

The woman of many perfumes appeared to have entered upon an altercation involving both the room clerk and the information clerk. As I followed Macumber's glance the Rawley's roly-poly little manager came bustling forth from his private office beyond the marble counter and advanced with gestures of placation. Dimmed star though she was from the Broadway viewpoint, Nina Stoddard plainly had not fallen out of the habit of expecting to have and demanding to have her way.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Madigan, awaking suddenly to the significance of proceedings at the desk. "Seems to be something doin'."

"Something in your line, Jerry," conjectured the Great One. "Both clerks have been looking over this way, anyhow."

As he spoke a bell boy whom the manager had beckoned to the desk came briskly toward the house detective's retreat.

"The boss has got a little job for you, sergeant," he said, and winked.

"Yeh?" grunted Madigan. "Who's lost what?"

"If you ask me," returned the boy cheerfully, "a lady has lost her meal ticket. Say, listen. They want you to slip upstairs and have a look in No. 1019."

Jeremiah Madigan smoothed a coat that needed no smoothing. He frowned portentously.

"All right," he said. "I can do that. Then what? What's the big idea? Whose room is it?"

"A Mr. Quast's. He's a bald-headed old gent from——"

Madigan turned his back on the messenger.

"Nina's angel!" he whispered, and then he addressed the boy again: "Yep, I know the party. Now tell me what I'm goin' to do in No. 1019 when I get there."

There was something biting in the interrogator's tone; the bell hop was moved to show himself possessed of a proud and sensitive nature. What knowledge he may have had he held suppressed.

"Search me," he said. "Just use your pass-key and your judgment."

## II.

The Great Macumber lifted himself lazily to his feet as the gate of the Rawley's leisurely passenger elevator clanged behind Madigan.

"For the life of me I can't see, lad," said he, "why Jerry should complain. What prettier problem might your true detective have laid before him than this presented by a shower bath which vanishes and reappears? Could the vulgar plundering of a bank vault or the casual and uninspired lifting of a pearl necklace be held to match it? Why, youngster, the train of speculation opened by the matter should keep an agile mind racing at top speed for days on end."

"But isn't it rather obvious," I objected, "that the mind of this J. Thomas What's-his-name has been doing a little racing on its own account?"

"Rubbish!" sniffed the Great One. "Madigan's trouble is yours. You both lack imagination. You pass what is beyond your ken with a shrug. A man tells you this or that has happened. He offers to you a page

from his book of personal experience—and according to whether the thing is or is not within your own experience you say that it is or is not so. Thus you and Jerry would call the occupant of room 917 a lunatic. But I, lad, should prefer to give him the benefit of a fair delicious doubt."

I presume I did not seem to Macumber properly impressed, for what there had been of banter in his tone went out of it.

"Mind, I'm not saying that the gentleman referred to by Madigan as '917' is indubitably sane," he added. "I merely decline to accept without reservation your hypothesis—which I assure you is born rather of mental languor than of any mental acuteness—that he is insane. It will be my business to become acquainted with J. Thomas and judge him for myself; and if my conclusion is Madigan's I confess I shall be most profoundly disappointed."

The Great One had crossed the lobby as he talked, nodding absently in response to the hails of acquaintances. Nina Stoddard, still at the desk but silent now and watching the elevator gate, looked at him a second time and inclined her head, murmuring his name.

"It has been years and years, but I could hardly have forgotten you," she said. "You've kept before your public, professor—and I am always part of it."

Macumber shoved our accumulated mail into his pocket without so much as glancing at it and prevaricated gracefully on the basis of knowledge recently acquired through Jerry Madigan.

"And you're putting up at the old Rawley once more?" he asked. "Is there another hotel in New York with a clientele at once so ephemeral and so constant?"

A negative would have been sufficient reply; but Miss Nina Stoddard, in a burst of such sometimes-appalling autobiographical frankness as show folk are wont to launch upon one another, must let the Great One know not only that she had no intention of returning to the Rawley but also her reason for this visit. She had established herself, semipermanently, in a small apartment—"the dearest, coziest little apartment," she proclaimed it. And we found her at the Rawley entirely by reason of the failure of a gentleman stopping there, a friend in a business as well as in a social way, to keep a luncheon engagement. He was a Mr. Arnold Quast of Buffalo. Perhaps we knew him—Mr. Quast, a quite prominent Buffalo capitalist and lately a patron of the theater in the larger sense? Then surely we must meet him!

In very strictest confidence, her voice trailing to a whisper, Miss Stoddard complimented Macumber with the information that Arnold Quast had been her financial associate in recent dramatic ventures. Those paying strict attention to the chirpings of a certain little bird, she intimated, were saying Mr. Quast contemplated an invasion of the Broadway managerial field in the near future.

Up to this point vivacity characterized the lady. Her mood changed with cinematographic suddenness.

"But really, professor," she said, "I'm terribly upset. I had quite a time with the hotel people after they'd telephoned up to Mr. Quast's room and had got no answer. They insisted he could not be in. But of course I knew that if he were physically able he would at least have communicated with me. In a business way our engagement was of the utmost importance; but for another and better reason I was certain he would not overlook the appointment. In fact, professor, we—we——"

Over this final revelation Nina Stoddard choked up. When she spoke again the ingénue impulse had been conquered.

"In fact," she concluded, lamely eluding the contemplated confidence, "in fact, I hurried here because of a presentiment that something had happened to Mr. Quast. I am afraid he is lying up there ill and helpless, unable to reach his telephone and summon aid. I insisted they should make certain and at last had to appeal to the manager himself. Now I am waiting for the report of some one who has been sent up to investigate. I——"

The leading lady of two decades gone clasped her hands and brought them to her bosom in a melodramatic gesture of suspense that seemed to me as exaggerated as the aggressive sprightliness of her attire. But there was nothing melodramatic—nothing theatrical in any way whatsoever—in what Nina Stoddard did when, a moment after Jerry Madigan had emerged from the returned elevator, her ears caught one word in the house detective's discreet whisper to the round little manager. Promptly and practically, with no more to-do than if she had never set foot upon stage, she fainted

—slumped limp into arms that the Great One miraculously had ready. For Macumber's ears, too, had caught the word:

"Dead!"

III.

The Rawley management proved itself equal to the exigency in hand, at least. With dispatch suggesting that the care of fainting women had been reduced to routine, in the fashion of a fire drill, Nina Stoddard was assisted to a parlor on the mezzanine and there was receiving the attention of the house physician before more than a couple of minutes had elapsed.

Macumber's calm voice cut in then on the colloquy at the desk.

"With all sympathy for the lady, Jerry," said he, "don't you think the doctor might be needed more on the tenth floor? There are such things as cataleptic states, you know. Or might not the man be unconscious and barely alive—or perhaps dying under a drug?"

"Not a chance," asserted the detective positively. "I've seen death often enough to know what I'm talkin' about. In this case, anyhow, there ain't any doubt. The tenth floor can wait for the doctor. He won't be long."

Nor was he. Hardly had the Great One accomplished his purpose of getting Madigan aside when the physician, an elderly practitioner who had made the Rawley his home and his office almost since the day of its opening and so had become in passing years "the actors' doctor," came trotting spryly down the mezzanine stairs.

"Where's this other case, now?" he demanded of Jerry Madigan. "I'd better have a look, don't you think?"

Madigan looked toward Macumber, who nodded and followed him into the elevator with the physician.

"What's happened to little Frank, Jerry?" asked the Great One as the car lumbered upward, for he had taken a fancy to the youth who had been in charge of the elevator for a year of days before our departure for Cleveland—and the operator now at the controller was a stranger.

"Frank?" said Madigan. "Oh, him and the night boy pulled a little strike a few days ago and the boss called a lockout on 'em."

"Too bad," remarked Macumber; at which comment, not precisely flattering to the new régime, Frank's successor turned upon the Great One a pair of slanting black eyes.

"Floor?" he inquired impersonally.

"Ten out for everybody," announced Madigan; and when we had reached this uppermost level of the hotel he strode to the door of a room diagonally opposite the shaft.

Suspended from the doorknob on a tasseled string was a square of cardboard like one which Macumber and I, habitually early risers, had got rid of long ago. It was the conventional notification to the house staff behind which nighthawks among the Rawley's residents take refuge as they turn their faces from the dawn; and to me its red-lettered warning, "Do Not Disturb," offered ample explanation of the reluctance of the people in the office to go beyond the jingling of the 1019 telephone.

The room into which Jerry Madigan led the way was one classified in hotel vernacular as a "parlor"—a sitting room, or living room, of about the same dimensions as that of our own suite on a lower floor and virtually identical in furnishings.

Madigan paused at the closed door of the bedroom to the left.

"First death in the house in two years, isn't it, doc?" he said. "I've sorta forgot who has to be notified."

"You can leave that to me, Jerry," the doctor told him good-naturedly, and shoved in the door unceremoniously.

The bedroom, like the sitting room, gave evidence of the casual tenancy of the occupant. A few toilet articles scattered on the dresser and a wardrobe trunk standing open in a corner were the only personal belongings in view, excepting clothing neatly arrayed on a chair beside the bed.

In the middle of the bed, his almost hairless head shining palely against the whiteness of the pillow, his face as placid as if he slept, lay Arnold Quast. The broad window was down from the top, I noticed, and for an instant I wondered at the odor of stale tobacco smoke hovering about the room. Then I recollected that Madigan had been puffing at his cigar as he went indignantly on his errand to 1019.

As the doctor crossed to the bed a feeling such as I had never before experienced in the presence of death came over me. It was nausea; I was faint, giddy. Many a time I had stood with Macumber over men who had died violently and horribly, but

not before had such an oppression ridden me as in this room. It struck me that here was my introduction to death in the peaceful form in which it most often comes; and perhaps Macumber's as well, for all that his predilection for mysteries not of his own manufacture had led him through the vortices of a hundred murder investigations before I became his stage assistant at magic and, as he had sometimes called me, his "secretary of extraneous affairs."

Dead faces I had seen that were terrible to behold. But the face of this man on the bed whose passing surely had been tranquil enough was somehow more terrible still. I could not take my eyes from it. I tried, and my head buzzed with the effort. Some other odor than that of the stale smoke, indefinable but overpowering, assailed me. I felt my legs weakening; and then the Great One, walking past me, put a steadying hand on my elbow. He pulled up the window from the bottom until the upper and lower sashes were side by side and as I gulped in the first rush of fresh air I heard him at the windows in the other room.

Macumber was sniffing when he returned as if he too had detected an alien odor.

"Well, Doctor Sanford?" said he.

The unhurried house physician was restoring his stethoscope to the inside pocket which served him as a sort of combination instrument case and medicine chest. He buttoned his coat over it.

"Twelve hours ago," he replied calmly, rolling a cigarette between his lean fingers, "I might have been able to do something for this man. I should say he's been dead nearly that long. Probably a heart case; at any rate I see evidence of nothing else."

"Aye, doctor, that may be," vouchsafed the Great Macumber. "But could you not smell it?"

"Eh? What's this?" demanded the man of medicine.

Macumber sniffed again.

"Do you mean you've not had a whiff of it yet, Sanford?" he queried mildly. "Tell me, aren't there potions smelling of peach pits which will stop hearts that are not diseased?"

The physician drew in a deep breath and knew the Great One's meaning. His nose crinkled and he coughed.

"By Godfrey!" he exclaimed. "You're right. It's unmistakable."

Macumber turned toward the house detective, who had stooped to recover the cigar stub on which his fingers all at once had lost their grip.

"It seems you entered your complaint overhastily, Jerry," he chided. "Business in your line is certainly picking up around the Rawley. Here's a guest dead—and a hint he didn't die naturally."

Madigan's eyes sought the doctor's.

"I get the peach-pit idea—and the smell," he averred. "Would you say it was suicide?"

Sanford debated the point judicially, and nodded.

"We'll need to do a little more investigating," he qualified. "But as Professor Macumber has suggested, it *smells* that way."

At this the Great One, preternaturally grave, only compressed his lips. Before speaking he filled his small black pipe and struck a match on an abused trouser leg which often I had seen gleaming phosphorescent in the darkness.

"The good doctor has not made his phrase carefully, sergeant," he said then, between puffs. "I did not say that the odor to which I called attention smelled like suicide. I said it smelled like peach pits."

"Sure," agreed Madigan, removing a flake of ash from the front of the impeccable cutaway. "Poison, you meant; didn't you, professor?"

"Precisely," said the Great One. "Suicide would be bad enough for the peace of mind of the management in this case, but is it not the part of the trained detective to suspect the worst until something less be proven? And might not poison be used just as well in a murder?"

## IV.

Ex-Sergeant Jeremiah Madigan, graduate of one of the world's most thorough schools for practical police training and seasoned by many years of detective experience, wasted no time in theorizing but wheeled unruffled into action. First he did what would have been done first in a similar case by any competent member of the department he had served so long—by a star man from headquarters or by a uniformed patrolman called in from his beat. Poison having caused a death, to the best of his knowledge, he sought a container. He looked in the bedclothing and under the bed, in the bathroom, behind the dresser, through the dresser drawers.

"Nothing doin'," he announced at length. "He must have drunk the stuff raw out of a bottle and chucked the bottle out the window. That could be, couldn't it, doc?"

Assured of that possibility, Madigan commented on the fact that he had come upon no letter from Arnold Quast giving grounds for dissatisfaction with life.

"Most often they leave 'em," said he, from the book. "But sometimes they don't; so that's that. About all there's left to do is notify the medical examiner, I guess. What do you say, doc?"

The house physician questioned Macumber with lifted eyebrows.

"No one knows the routine better than Jerry," remarked the Great One.

"Oh, certainly," said Sanford, "that will have to be done at once. I couldn't sign a death certificate, of course. There must be an autopsy. But you mentioned the possibility of murder, professor. I'd scarcely fancy such a thing in a poison case of this kind myself. Were you serious? Have you any concrete reason to suspect——"

"Not a reason in the world," confessed Macumber amiably. "But I do have a considerable if not altogether legitimate curiosity in the matter. I'm wondering if the lady who fainted might not be able to suggest a possible motive. Would she be in condition to talk now, do you think? Good! Wait for me here or in our own rooms, lad. I'll be only a few minutes."

Madigan shrugged as the Great One turned and left us.

"In a clear case of suicide the last thing a policeman will worry himself about is why they done it," he said. "It's the newspaper reporters that dig after that end of the thing. The professor has some good ideas on criminal investigation—but he's got some queer notions, too. Not so, doc?"

House physician and house detective went together to make their report to the manager of the hotel and to pass on to the proper authorities any problem which might remain concerning the demise of the unfortunate occupant of room 1019; but I stopped short of the office floor.

Macumber's "few minutes" ran to a half hour and then to an hour while I impatiently awaited his return. When at last he appeared he explained he had accompanied Nina Stoddard to her apartment in a taxi, having found her sufficiently recovered to make the trip.

"She's completely broken up by the death of Quast," said he, "and about that there can be no doubt. Her grief is genuine enough, though whether because she sees her hopes of a triumphal return to Broadway gone glimmering, or because she really had learned to care for the man, I'd not say. They were to have been married, at all events, before he returned to Buffalo."

"Did she let drop any hint of a reason why he should have killed himself?" I asked. "Had he found the resetting of a star in the dramatic firmament beyond his means, perhaps?"

"No," said the Great One. "Jerry Madigan was right on that score. Nina made money for him on the road after breaking even on a short run in Chicago. The play was one written years ago by her late husband—a piece she admired so much in spite of the universal managerial attitude, by the way, that she accepted full rights to it in lieu of problematical alimony at the parting. Nina had intended, she said, to try it on Broadway."

Macumber slipped comfortably into the shapeless old dressing gown which I had thrown across the back of his favorite chair the moment I walked into our rooms.

"Barring domestic complications which may have existed and yet have been outside Miss Stoddard's knowledge, I've unearthed no reason why he should have taken his own life. He'd all the money he could ever wish for, although quite a bit of his capital was tied up in business enterprises up State. Miss Stoddard said he had intended to draw his irons from the fire one after another, in as quick succession as might be—and that, he had told her, he could readily do. His health was good; many active years were yet ahead of him. The lady would not believe he had killed himself."

"So all in all, maestro," said I, "you find yourself exactly where you started. As Jerry Madigan says, the newspapers will nose out the motive as they always do. *Your* interest in Arnold Quast, his affairs and his death, is as inexplicable to me as your excitement over the absurd obsession of the neurotic who has to have help to find his shower bath."

The Great One smiled.

"Ah, lad! It's the vanishing shower bath which really has my interest, after all. The manner in which it comes and goes fascinates me. Except for that I'll assure you

that death in the house, suicide in the house, even murder in the house, would have had scant attention from me this day of the gr-rand home-coming."

I looked hard at him, but could detect no glint of mockery in his expression.

"Are *you* losing your mind too, maestro?"

"Perhaps," said Macumber. "But would you say, lad, that the obsession of the guest with the tricky shower bath is any more ridiculous than that harbored by one Henry C. Munday—whose case may not entirely have escaped your memory? Did not Mr. Munday assert with all solemnity in your hearing that not once but several times friends in whose company he sat had suddenly taken on grotesque and unbelievable shapes? Did you not inform me with utmost confidence that the lunatic asylum for which he was headed was the proper place for Munday, lad? And then was I not able to show——"

"That is all true," I confessed, humbled but not completely crushed. "As I distinctly recall, however, that case hinged upon the deft substitution for Munday's glasses of a pair with distorted lenses. And certainly had it not been for your intervention the man's insistence that he had seen what he had seen would have landed him in a madhouse to the enrichment of the inspired schemers. But would you tell me that eyeglasses can be responsible for the strange delusion of the J. Thomas person?"

The Great Macumber yawned.

"I mean only to say," he amended, "that when I heard of the incident of the vanishing shower I did not expect it to stand by itself. I looked for something else to be happening; and lo! at once we have a woman fainting in our quiet lobby and news of a guest who has died in his bed. And now that we have reason to believe that this was not a natural death why should I abandon my original intention of seeking the acquaintance of J. Thomas Rotherham? You see, lad, you have quite mistaken my point. The analogy between the cases of the Messrs. Munday and Rotherham as I would cite it to you is not on the question of eyeglasses, but on the question of sanity."

## V.

After dinner that evening Macumber went to room 917 to introduce himself to J. Thomas Rotherham and seek further light on the mystery of the vanishing shower bath. Again he was gone much longer than I had anticipated.

"You two," I greeted the Great One, "seem to have hit it off pretty well together."

"I'd scarcely say that, lad," said he. "No, I could not describe my reception as cordial. J. Thomas appeared rather to resent my interest in his shower. About all I got from him was a somewhat blasphemous confirmation of what we have had already from Jerry Madigan and in addition the thought that he is a very busy man with matters of far larger importance weighing upon him. This last might have been accepted by a more sensitive soul as an invitation not to linger."

"That closes your inquiry, then?"

"Not at all, lad. It's no more than a starting point. I was quite pleased with Mr. Rotherham, in fact. He may have his little eccentricities, but he's sane, youngster, he's eminently sane. Indeed, he so interested me that I made further inquiries concerning him here and there about the hotel.

"He's a writing person of a sort, J. Thomas, I gather; and yet a creature of regular habit. He breakfasts in the grill between eight and nine and leaves the hotel directly. After the luncheon hour he returns, goes to his room and pounds away on a portable typewriter until dinner time. In the evening there's more writing, but now with pen or pencil—from which I judge that at some time in the past Mr. Rotherham has been admonished against clattering the keys in a hotel at night. Beyond all this, I think I have discovered a reason for the gentleman's extreme testiness."

"Yes?" said I, marveling afresh at Macumber's facility in gathering up loose threads of information. "And that is?"

"You might almost call this official, for I have it from Walker of *Stage Topics,* who knew him years ago and upon whom Rotherham turned loose his grievance on discovering him as a fellow guest of the Rawley. J. Thomas, it seems, had come to town from his home in southern New Jersey expecting to stay only a day or two and consequently not equipped for a longer visit. Then he discovered that the book-length manuscript he had brought along must be revised before final acceptance. Each morning some new change has been suggested to him and so he has lingered, expecting each day to be the last and living in his suit case, as you might say."

"If I knew the reason for your curiosity in regard to Rotherham, maestro," said I, "then I might share your interest in the man. Is it possible you suspect him of having had some connection with the death of Nina Stoddard's angel?"

"Anything is possible, lad," retorted the Great One sleepily. "Let us turn in now, and in the morning I will take you along on a little prowling expedition which I project."

At breakfast I saw Rotherham, whom I had not noticed in the lobby the day before, for the first time. He returned Macumber's cheery "Good morning!" with a curt nod and reapplied himself to a nearsighted perusal of his newspaper.

Rotherham left the hotel lugging a fat brief case a few minutes before Jerry Madigan made his elegant entrance. Not until then did Macumber make a move, although our table had long since been cleared. He walked away from me and briefly engaged the house detective in conversation. I saw Madigan reach into his pocket and hand something to the Great One; but Macumber made no mention of it and when, in the elevator, I would have questioned him he shook his head.

When the elevator had discharged us and was descending, the Great One led off in the direction opposite to that in which our rooms lay. I followed him, wondering, until he opened a door leading to a rear stairway. We climbed to the eighth floor, and then emerged into the corridor again, circling back to the street side of the house. Macumber glanced down the elevator shaft, then slipped a key into a door directly across from it and drew me into the room.

"This, lad," said he, "is the first stop on our promised prowl. I may say that Jerry made the party possible by lending me his pass-key. Do you see anything unusual about the room we're in?"

I didn't. To me it was just a hotel room "made up" and in readiness to receive any guest casually assigned to it.

"But there really is something odd about it," said the Great One, glancing first into a cavernous clothes closet and then into the bath.

"What's odd?" I asked. "And what are you looking for?"

Macumber grinned.

"I'm looking," said he, "for Mr. Wilfred Tyson of Galene, Michigan. And the thing that's odd about the room is the neatness of Mr. Tyson, lad. You'd not think he'd been occupying it for four days, would you now?"

Satisfied with his swift and superficial inspection, the Great One strode back to the door. He opened it an inch or two, peered out, and then beckoned me into the corridor after him. Again we ascended the rear stairway, leaving it after climbing a single flight to the ninth story. I followed on, growing more mystified with each step, to the front of the house.

As we came to the junction of the side corridor with the main hallway paralleling the street the Great One caught my arm and drew me back. His ear had detected a whirring which told him the elevator was in motion. The whirring grew louder and presently the car rattled past our level, discharged a passenger at the tenth floor and descended.

The elevator was well toward the bottom of the shaft before Macumber stirred.

"It's as well, lad," said he, "that we are not observed. In a technical sense, at least, our enterprise becomes burglarious at the next step. We're going to have a look at room 917 in the absence of Mr. J. Thomas Rotherham."

The Great One slipped his pass-key into the door of the room of the vanishing shower as he spoke and walked sedately in.

Excepting that a suit case sat upon a rack beside the dresser and a portable typewriter stood before a chair at the window, we might have been reëntering the room which we had just visited. The furnishings were identical and were placed, moreover, exactly as in the chamber below.

"Mr. Rotherham, you'll observe," announced Macumber softly, "travels light. But with his personal possessions we are not concerned. The purpose of our call would be merely to inspect the plumbing."

The Great One crossed to the bathroom and looked in.

"I fancy," said he with a grim chuckle, "that our friend's peregrinating shower bath has settled down for good and all. It's back where it belongs, and very solidly installed it appears to be. Do you not begin to see light now, lad?"

"I do—and I don't," said I.

Macumber eyed me somberly.

"Well," he remarked in the tone of weary patience which he delighted to affect in ex-

positional passages, "this apartment is No. 917, is it not? The other room to which I took you is No. 817, directly below. Directly above us, if you will stop to think, is the room in which Mr. Arnold Quast died. The Quast suite is No. 1019; but the bedroom of the suite is No. 1017."

"That's right!" said I. "And you believe that——"

"I *know* that the slayer of Quast operated from this room in which we now stand."

"Rotherham——"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the Great One. "I weep for your density, lad. Rotherham was merely in the way; and in most efficient fashion combining boldness of conception with craftiness of execution he was got out of the way. His nearsightedness was a boon to those who plotted the death of Quast, of course. They planned to launch their attack from below, and when the time came they simply led Rotherham into room 817 after having transferred his few effects down from No. 917. This they did twice. This was necessary because Quast disappointed them once by staying out all night. It was on the morning following that night, as I learned in the course of my inquiries here and there, that Rotherham first complained of the disappearance of his shower."

"That shower again!" I cried. "What *is* the answer?"

Macumber lifted a cautioning finger to his lips.

"This is no place to be shouting, lad. I'm surprised you should forget it—and yet more surprised that you should have to ask the question. Those who had use for room 917 and were confronted with the problem of getting rid temporarily of Rotherham first assured themselves that room 817 was furnished in exactly the same style and then proceeded to get Rotherham into it. Just one thing—and a very natural one—they overlooked. The bathroom of 917 was equipped with a shower; the bathroom of No. 817 had only a tub. Must not some such explanation have occurred to any alert mind dissecting the complaint of Mr. J. Thomas Rotherham?"

"It would not have occurred to mine," said I. "Your explanation serves only to make the whole business more fantastic. You still say that Quast was killed by poison?"

The Great One nodded.

"I can be positive. And before the day is out I think I can promise to introduce you to the person—or maybe the persons—guilty of the murder."

I had had another question in my mind, but Macumber's cool assertion threw me onto another track.

"Whom do you suspect, maestro?"

"I'd not be astonished," replied the Great One, "if the generalship directing the death plot were that of a couple of eminent criminal specialists whose acquaintance we both have made in this very hotel. One of the gentlemen of whom I am thinking, lad, rejoices in the sobriquet of 'The Red Duke.' And in the selectest underworld circles his associate is known as 'His Nibs.' If ever a job bore a signature, this murder of Arnold Quast registers itself as the handiwork of those two distinguished Rotarians of crime. I don't believe there's another group in the trade that could have——"

"But how could a man like Quast have got himself involved with any such outfit?"

"Tush," said the Great One. "It would be enough that some one wishing him out of the way should have had an introduction to the organization which came so close not long ago to adding our own precious scalps to its collection. With His Nibs and The Red Duke murder is not a matter of malice. It is a profession. They accept and execute commissions in that line when it is made worth their while, making the plans and supplying the workmen just as do contractors in other fields. They work usually with such finesse that murders in which they have had a hand are not easily to be identified as murders. In the present case how do you suppose matters would be standing now had it not been for the clarifying submystery of the vanishing shower bath and the lingering odor of peach pits in the room of death?"

"Peach pits again!" said I. "That's what I don't understand. Why the use of the room below in a murder by poison?"

Macumber became suddenly tense. Listening with him, I heard the rattling of the elevator cables, then a thump as the car came to a stop. The gate clanged, only four or five yards from where we stood and almost immediately a key was fitted into the door of No. 917.

The Great One and I made a swift and silent retreat into the clothes closet as the door opened. My first thought had been that J. Thomas Rotherham, abandoning his

schedule of other days, had returned to trap us in his room. But there was something in the soft and hasty reclosing of the hall door, something stealthy in the footsteps outside our refuge, which suggested it was not the rightful occupant of No. 917 who had surprised us. Indeed, within a couple of seconds I had decided that more than one person had entered. That I judged merely from the padding of feet on the rug; presently I heard a confirmatory whisper, and peering through the crack in the closet door I saw two figures.

One of the two new intruders I recognized. It was the day-elevator operator who had succeeded to the job vacated by the Great Macumber's favored Frank.

Macumber, gently nudging me aside, also had a look through the crack. His breath came faster as he watched.

"Be ready to follow me, lad," he whispered close to my ear, and then with a vigorous kick he sent the door flying open and stepped out into the room, his automatic in his hand.

"Let's see how high you can reach, gentlemen!" urged the Great One, calm and cordial. "Ah, no! Just leave the toy where it is, please!"

The day elevator operator had stooped toward the bottom drawer of the dresser, which stood open. He straightened at Macumber's command, and I saw lying in the back of the drawer the bright nickeled barrel of a child's air rifle.

"I will ask you to close the drawer, lad," said the Great One politely. "Possibly the neat little weapon has been reloaded; and in that event its discharge, accidental or otherwise, might not unlikely be the cause of four more deaths in the Hotel Rawley. By name, perhaps, you are not as well acquainted as our friends here with the gas called cyanogen. It has the smell of peach pits, lad, as have sundry poisons in liquid form which are no more deadly. When released, I have been informed, cyanogen expands to hundreds of thousands of times its volume and a whiff of it is enough to kill."

Macumber lifted the automatic sharply.

"Please don't make it necessary for me to incapacitate you," he said, having read in a glance exchanged between the later visitors to room 917 a thought of rushing him. "That's right. Get the hands as close to the ceiling as you can. And, by the way, lad, we're going to have a close look at that ceiling later and the floor of No. 1017 as well. But that, as well as examination of the air gun, can wait. In the meantime you'd favor me by telephoning down to the office for Mr. Madigan. Tell him I'm ready to hand over the murderers of Arnold Quast!"

Within a half hour the Great Macumber had unobtrusively effaced himself from further activities in connection with the killing of Arnold Quast—a matter which he insists on alluding to, despite other *outré* elements involved, as the "case of the vanishing shower." The arrival of detectives from headquarters appeared to mark the lapse of the Great One's interest. He went directly to our own rooms, replaced his coat with his dressing gown and filled a pipe. Nor did he seem vastly elated when Jerry Madigan brought to him later news of the finding of a broken gelatine capsule in No. 1017 which smelled of peach pits and of the subsequent discovery of a hole which had been bored neatly up through the ceiling of room 917—a hole concealed below by a chandelier cap—and the floor of No. 1017.

"It was obvious at the beginning, Jerry," said Macumber, "that there was a connection between the tribulation of J. Thomas Rotherham and the death of Quast. There *had* to be, don't you see? The mystery of the shower bath was too exquisite to be based on an hallucination. I suspected at once that either or both of the new elevator operators would be responsible for having let the nearsighted Rotherham off at the wrong floor and having led him into the wrong room. So——"

"But how would they know that No. 817 wouldn't be rented to some one else? How'd they get the key?" demanded the house detective.

Macumber's speculative eyes followed a smoke cloud as it curled toward the window.

"The killing of Quast, if I'm not mistaken," said he, "was the work not of individuals but of possibly the most dangerous criminal combination New York has ever known. Room 817 was rented, by a man who never occupied it, and paid for in advance for a week. This was done when it seemed likely that the transient occupant of No. 917 might stay on indefinitely. The method of the murder had been absolutely fixed, and it was essential that the murderers

have access to the room below Quast's. Thus the first step of the men assigned to the job after they had discovered No. 917 in possession of Rotherham was to figure out some way of eliminating him temporarily. Time was short, and they found a suggestion in the fact that the Rawley has only one passenger elevator. If you'll look up Frank and his partner I believe you'll learn that the strike was inspired from the outside. Aye, Jerry, these lads I've in mind are fair demons for detail."

Madigan brought a silk handkerchief from a tail pocket of the cutaway and mopped his forehead.

"Maybe you know what you're talkin' about, professor," he said, "but I don't get you. What do you mean, the time was short?"

"I mean that Quast had to be got out of the way quickly or else his death would have been of benefit to no one. In a very few days he was to have married Nina Stoddard. And the marriage had to be prevented, I surmise. At any rate, I learn through Miss Stoddard of a business partner of Quast's up State who presumably might have been left in a bad way by the withdrawal of the Quast capital from their associate enterprises. This man is a lawyer with a criminal practice, I am told, and is named as executor in Arnold Quast's will as well. The existence of a widow might conceivably have been a considerable embarrassment to him. Indeed, Jerry, I'd advise you and the men from headquarters to look up Mr. Samuel Hazzard of Buffalo if only as a matter of police routine. Perhaps from him you may find out whence came the money for the expenses attached to the carefully arranged demise of his partner."

When Jerry Madigan had gone, shaking his head but carrying with him a note of Hazzard's name—a name, incidentally, destined to figure in one of the most remarkable prosecutions based on purely circumstantial evidence on which the State of New York ever went to trial—Macumber yawned luxuriously.

"I'm beginning to be bored with the whole business," said he. "The rest is up to the people downtown and I'll be quite content to get whatever further knowledge may be forthcoming from the newspapers. But what I'm wondering is if we may not be hearing first, in some more or less unpleasant fashion, from our ducal friend and his fellow leader of the underworld Rotarians. Hi! What would this be now? Answer the phone, lad."

As I put the receiver to my ear a chill and somehow familiar voice came to me over the wire.

"Is it Professor Macumber speaking?"

"Just a moment," said I, and called the Great One.

For a moment Macumber stood listening.

"I'm truly delighted to have heard from you," he said at length. "Indeed, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity of congratulating you on what must rank from your standpoint as a well-nigh perfect piece of work."

From the telephone, when he had restored the receiver to the hook, the Great One turned to me. He was smiling.

"Well, lad," said he, " 'twas the gentleman they call 'The Red Duke,' and he's had the news very quickly. My guess was right as concerned his connection with the vanishing shower and the passing of Arnold Quast. He as much as told me that, also imparting the information that for a time to come he will be out of the city. It was splendid of him, indeed, to think of me; but, more than certain suggestions which he made, I liked the last cordial words from him."

The Great One's smile became broader.

"I'd say," said he, holding a match to his pipe, "that the future may hold certain exciting potentialities for us. For when I told him good-by what did his Oxford excellency reply but 'Au revoir?' "

*Watch for more "Great Macumber" stories in future issues.*

## A JUDICIAL VERDICT

CHIEF JUSTICE TAFT, with his New England ancestry, likes to hear a good sermon, but he is no friend of the long-winded preacher.

At a Washington dinner recently, when the subject came up, he said:

"A sermon ought to be about twenty minutes long, with a leaning toward mercy."

# A Chat With You

THIS is the time of year when the folders sent out by railroad lines and ocean-steamship companies look especially attractive. Pretty girls smile at us from observation platforms of fast trains and beckon to us from the decks of ocean greyhounds. Canadian Rockies try to lure us with their more majestic charms. There are bargains in the way of trips to Ireland. California is always ready to be visited. One steamship company is starting a specially conducted trip right round the world.

* * * *

FOR our part we have never found travel quite what it was cracked up to be. We have enjoyed it, but most of the enjoyment has come after the trip was over and we got back home. To cross the ocean, or the American continent has had, in a sense, a disheartening effect on us. There seems to be too much space between different places. It takes so long to get anywhere. There are so many miles of land and water without any variety and without anything particular to see on it. The ideal country to travel in would be rather small; compact and highly romantic. There would not be too many people in it, nor too few.

* * * *

DOUBTLESS the hardy salesman who does little else than travel can rest as easily in a Pullman as he can anywhere else. It puts a strain on us. There is always the dread of losing our ticket, or still worse, our pocketbook. We knew a fellow who through a strange misadventure lost all his clothes on a train. Shaving in the washroom of a train crowded with other people is anything but a delight.

Once we used to start on railroad trips looking forward to adventures of various sorts we would meet on the way. We went right across the American continent and our only adventure was getting a cinder in our eye and keeping it there most of a day.

As for meeting interesting people—as a matter of fact, any one is interesting if you get to know him well, but he is no more interesting on a train or steamship than he is anywhere. One man we met on a Southern railroad had a peculiar habit. He chewed the end of a toothpick dipped in snuff. The only other thing we remember about him was that he paid ninety dollars for the suit of clothes he was wearing and seemed proud of it. Another man we met in New England described at great length an operation that his wife had recently undergone and illustrated it with diagrams. We wondered what his wife would have thought had she heard him. Another man spent an hour telling us how his son had just been married and that he had made him a wedding present of an automobile. Still another New Englander made the hours fly by explaining at great length how much cheaper, more desirable, and generally more sensible it was to live at Bath, Maine, than in New York.

He made us quite discontented, for there is no chance of our getting a job in Bath, and we are not in a position to retire so that we can live there. The airplane is our hope. You can go from New York to Newport now in an hour and eighteen minutes and the day may come when we can commute to Bath. The trouble with travel is that it takes so long to get to any place that is

interesting and there are so many untidy-looking places in between.

So far as meeting beautiful girls on trains is concerned we have never had any luck. We like to think that it is our own bashfulness, though it may be something else.

* * * *

AS a matter of fact we have had more fun traveling while seated in this office than we ever had on a train or a ship. Let the author do it, is a good motto. We have rambled through southern Europe a good deal these last few months. The guide who went with us is James Francis Dwyer and he set the scene so that he gave us a distinctly romantic thrill at every stop. The stories will start in an early issue of the magazine—a new series about the Texas Wasp—and you will understand why we enjoyed them so much as soon as you see them.

* * * *

THEN there is Burton E. Stevenson, an author who travels a lot but who doesn't write as many novels as we would like to have him. Stevenson puts us aboard the Marseilles express at the Gare de Lyon in Paris. We just manage to get aboard by a hair's breadth. We are bound for the south, for Algiers and the romantic country of north Africa, but we do not have to wait to arrive there for adventure. Things happen on the train Stevenson has picked out for us. In the first place a perfect stranger hands us a ticket for a first-class reservation just as we scramble aboard. In the second place the seat beside us is occupied by a romantically beautiful woman. In the third place somebody sits in our place while we are dining with the beautiful lady in the dining car and gets killed for his pains. A good start, but it gets better and better as the journey proceeds. Stevenson can conduct tours better than Cook's. The story we are talking about is called "The Storm Center." It is a tale of mystery, romantic adventure and love, having for its setting a part of north Africa that few white men visit. Stevenson has been there as a guest of the French government. He is one of the greatest masters of the adventure story living to-day and in "The Storm Center" he has given us the best he has ever written. It starts in the issue out two weeks from now.

* * * *

TRAVEL if you can afford to and have the time. But remember that if you cannot do it in the flesh, you can always travel under the best auspices and with the most competent guides through the medium of this magazine. In the next number we are running a string of specially conducted trips to Paris, Africa, Arizona, Montana, the South Seas, London and New York. Stevenson, Knibbs, Winter, Greene, Stacpoole, Wallace, and Montanye furnish the transportation.

Twenty cents at the nearest news stand will give you a pass to all these places.

# Gee! But It's Great To Be Healthy!

Up in the morning brimming with pep. Eat like a kid and off for the day's work feeling like a race horse. You don't care how much work awaits you, for that's what you crave—hard work and plenty of it. And when the day is over, are you tired? I should say not. Those days are gone forever. That's the way a strong, healthy man acts. His broad chest breathes deep with oxygen purifying his blood so that his very body tingles with life. His brain is clear and his eyes sparkle. He has a spring to his step and a confidence to tackle anything at any time.

## Pity the Weakling

Don't you feel sorry for those poor fellows dragging along through life with a neglected body? They are up and around a full half hour in the morning before they are half awake. They taste a bite of food and call it a breakfast. Shuffle off to work and drag through the day. It's no wonder so few of them ever succeed. Nobody wants a dead one hanging around. It's the live ones that count.

## Strength Is Yours

Wake up fellows and look the facts in the face. It's up to you right now. What do you plan to be—a live one or a dead one? Health and strength are yours if you'll work for them, so why choose a life of suffering and failure?

Exercise will do it. By that I mean the right kind of exercise. Yes, your body needs it just as much as it does food. If you don't get it you soon develop into a flat-chested, narrow-shouldered weakling with a brain that needs all kinds of stimulants and foolish treatments to make it act. I know what I am talking about. I haven't devoted all these years for nothing. Come to me and give me the facts and I'll transform that body of yours so you won't know it. I will broaden your shoulders, fill out your chest, and give you the arms and legs of a real man. Meanwhile, I work on the muscles in and around your vital organs, making your heart pump rich, pure blood and putting real pep in your old backbone. This is no idle talk. I don't promise these things—I guarantee them. If you doubt me, come on and make me prove it. That's what I like.

Earle E. Liederman as he is to-day

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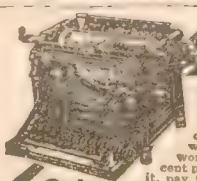

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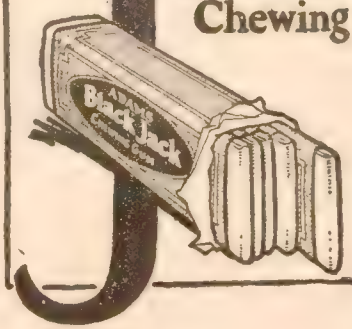


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## Few People Know How Useful it is in Preserving Health and Beauty

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Charcoal is a remedy that the more you take of it the better; it is not a drug at all, but simply absorbs the gases and impurities always present in the stomach and intestines and carries them out of the system.

Charcoal sweetens the breath after smoking, and after eating onions and other odorous vegetables.

Charcoal effectually clears and improves the complexion, it whitens the teeth and further acts as a natural and eminently safe cathartic.

It absorbs the injurious gases which collect in the stomach and bowels; it disinfects the mouth and throat from the poison of catarrh.

All druggists sell charcoal in one form or another, but probably the best charcoal and the most for the money is in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges; they are composed of the finest quality Willow charcoal powdered to extreme fineness, then compressed in tablet form or rather in the form of large, pleasant tasting lozenges, the charcoal being sweetened to be smooth and palatable.

The daily use of these lozenges will soon tell in a much improved condition of the general health, better complexion, sweeter breath and purer blood, and the beauty of it is that no possible harm can result from their continued use, but on the contrary, great benefit.

Many physicians advise Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges to patients suffering from gas in stomach and bowels, and to clear the complexion and purify the breath, mouth and throat. They are also believed to greatly benefit the liver. These lozenges cost but thirty cents a box at drug stores, and you get more and better charcoal in Stuart's Absorbent Lozenges than in any of the ordinary charcoal tablets.

# It wasn't easy to tell him

OF course, it wasn't an easy thing for Barton to tell him. But the sales manager had studied and observed his man, had found the cause and then, fortunately, had the courage to tell him.

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That's the insidious thing about halitosis (unpleasant breath). You, yourself, rarely know when you have it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle.

It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these peculiar properties as a breath deodorant. It halts food fermentation in the mouth and leaves the breath sweet, fresh and clean. So the systematic use of Listerine puts you on the safe and polite side. You know your breath is right. Fastidious people everywhere are making it a regular part of their daily routine.

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# The Unknown Seven

## *By* HARRY COVERDALE

INTRODUCING to the American reading public a new criminologist who is destined, by reason of the author's skill at character delineation, to become as famous as Sherlock Homes.

This seems rather a broad and sweeping statement on the part of the publishers of the book, but we feel certain that all those who prefer a good detective story to any other form of reading, will agree with us.

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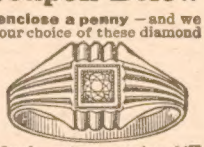

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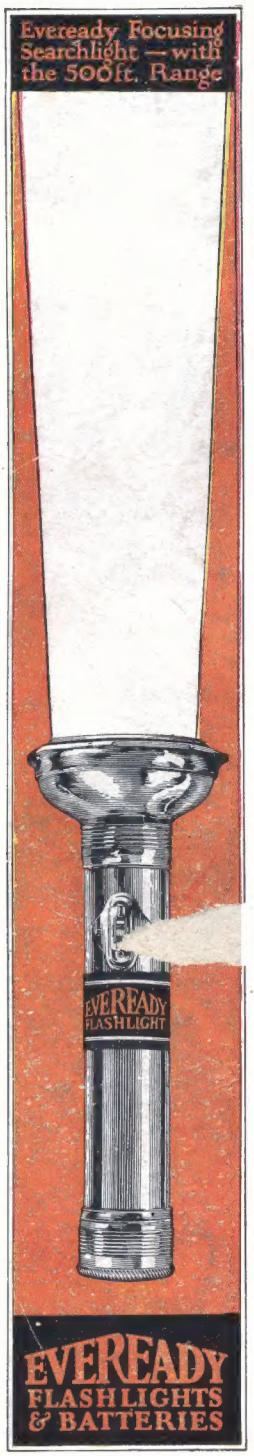

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